

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYESSE

Haftarah: Hoshea 11:7 – 12:12
DECEMBER 9-10, 2016 10 KISLEV 5777

**DEDICATION: In memory of Sra Mizrahi – 9 Kislev
Frieda Azrak Schmertzler – 10 Kislev**

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Editors Notes

Eliphaz, Poverty, Wealth and Onkelos

There are those who enjoy the luxury of traveling first class and there are those who would rather endure a few hours with the worst airline sitting in the worst seat if it saves them a few bucks. What a contrast two seats and two airlines can make in travel. We see that same contrast in "flights" from Israel up to Syria in these parshiot. Two weeks ago we read of the servant of Abraham going up to Syria to find a wife for Isaac. He takes with him a caravan of ten camels along with servants, gold, silver, jewelry, clothing, gifts, fruits and delicacies. First class going and coming.

Last week, Isaac commanded his son Jacob to go up to Syria for the same purpose. Upon Jacob's arrival, Laban comes to greet him. Although Eliezer came almost 100 years prior, Laban remembers that wealth and wonders where can Jacob be hiding the jewels? He hugs him and kisses him, but as the police warn tourists, sometimes a hug is just a pickpocket practicing their craft. Laban finds nothing and wonders. Yaakov tells him what happened.

Isaac would certainly not send Jacob empty handed, but along the way Jacob was robbed and left with nothing, not even the clothes on his back. The verse in Psalms reads, Esa Eynay El HeHarim – I raise my eyes to the mountains. Where will help come from?

The Midrash elaborates instead of Harim, read Horim. Jacob is pleading to Hashem that he raises his eyes to his parents, to Eliezer's search for a wife for his father Isaac. Here he is penniless, where will his ezri – help or perhaps his "Eliezer" come from?

So what happened? The rabbis explain that Esav bound his son Eliphaz with an oath to slay Jacob. He reminds Eliphaz that with Jacob's death the birthright would be taken by them with all its rewards. Eliphaz having grown on the lap of Isaac his grandfather is concerned with what was required of him and turns to his concubine Timna. Recall that Timna was a Princess, but she wanted to convert. She came to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob [to convert] but they would not accept her. She then became a concubine to Eliphaz the son of Esau. She said that it was better to be a maidservant to this nation rather than to be a powerful woman in another nation.

She suggested that Eliphaz come up with some way to avoid killing Jacob. Eliphaz with mixed emotions pursues his uncle, who undoubtedly was his teacher as well. He is committed to respecting his father and to honoring his vow. Is there a way out he must wonder?

When they meet, Jacob implores Eliphaz not to kill him and gives him everything he had with him. Jacob tells Eliphaz, "Take what I have, for a poor man is counted as dead – (thus I can remain alive and you will have fulfilled in some way your vow)."

Rabbi Pinches Friedman, (a most captivating teacher and the source for this week's lesson) explains the above and then quoting the Chiddushei HaRim suggests that Hashem orchestrated that Yaakov would face the ordeal of poverty which is a test of faith and a test of maintaining truth and honesty. Through Jacob's success, he paved the way for all Israel to withstand the test of poverty.

The Ketav Sofer goes further and explains that Jacob faced this test of poverty in order for him to be able to withstand the test of wealth which he would face in Charan. The test of wealth he suggests is even greater, because the poor man always looks to G-d. The wealthy man forgets Him.

We will read next week that “the sun rose for him (Jacob)”. And the Rabbis ask. Did the sun not rise for everyone? They answer just as we see at the outset of this week’s portion that the sun set quickly in anticipation of the dream with the ladder, so the sun rose quickly. The rabbis quoting the Mishna teach, “Whoever fulfills the Torah in a state of poverty will ultimately fulfill it in wealth.” They explain that just as the sun, his wealth, was quickly wiped away as a setting sun, his wealth would come quickly as the rising sun. If one can succeed in poverty maintaining faith and honesty, he will succeed as a wealthy man, be it more difficult, as well.

But what became of Eliphaz? Why should I care? Is someone rewarded for not killing? If we consider that killing was certainly in Eliphaz’s nature with Esav as his father and Amalek as his son, then perhaps in overcoming his nature, he should be greatly rewarded? Furthermore we read, “The world rests on three pillars—on the Torah, on the “avodah” (the sacred service), and on “gemilut chasadim – kind deeds”. The last is Abraham who welcomed and entertained guests. Yitzchak Avinu, who was bound on the alter as a korban, represents the sacrificial service. Jacob who is Yoshev Ohalim represents the pillar of Torah. So in overcoming his command and his nature in not killing Jacob, Eliphaz saved the pillar of Torah.

Rabbi Yochanan said: HKB”H does not withhold the reward of any creature, even the reward for refined speech. We find in the book of Iyov – Job that among the colleagues who responded to Iyov’s complaints was Eliphaz HaTeimani. Rashi says this is Eliphaz the son of Esav. And the rabbis count him among the seven prophets of the goyim who merited that the shechina rest upon him.

But it doesn’t end there as the Rama of Pano explains: Onkelos was an “ibur” of Eliphaz. Onkelos, the nephew of Hadrian Ceaser and of Titus Ceasem Y’SV, converted to Judaism. He studied under Rabbi Eliezer b. Hyrcanus and Rabbi Yehoshua b. Hananiah and took their teachings and authored the Targum which we are commanded to read each week as an explanation of the written Torah. Onkelos received within him the soul of Eliphaz.

The Talmud in Gittin tells us that when Onkelos thought to convert he conducted a séance raising the spirit of Titus (a reincarnation of Esav) from the dead to seek his advice. Titus explained that the road to success in this world comes through tormenting the Jews but was forced to admit he was punished daily and that in fact in the future world it is those who observe the Torah who are at the top. The Gemara continues and states that Onkelos went on consulting

with other spirits from the dead, including the wicked Bilam and the Christian Yeshu. His decision to convert is based on what he learned, much as Eliphaz after consulting Timna and consulting Jacob is able to avoid killing his uncle.

In saving Jacob, the pillar of Torah, Eliphaz merits through Onkelos to become a pillar of our learning. What an amazing reward?

And again we learn, what goes around comes around.

For those of us in poverty, we pray that we succeed with Hashem’s help in the test and that the sun rise quickly for us. And may we all be blessed and successful in the even greater test of wealth. We pray that as Eliphaz overcame his nature, that we be blessed to overcome our nature and through that bring Mashiach BimHera BeYameynu Amen.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi David Bibi

Jewish Voice newspaper calls for boycott of French products after 1967 lines labeling

After Israeli Deputy Minister for Diplomacy Michael Oren said Israelis should “think twice” about purchasing French products, the New York-based newspaper The Jewish Voice directly called for a boycott of French products. Credit: Anne Mandlebaum via Wikimedia Commons."

(JNS.org) The New York-based newspaper The Jewish Voice is calling on the pro-Israel community to boycott French-made products in response to France’s recent decision to issue labels distinguishing between Israeli products from within and beyond the 1967 lines.

“We are calling on all supporters of Israel, be they Jewish or not, to immediately cease and desist in the purchase of any and all products made in France,” the newspaper wrote in an editorial published Dec. 2. “And that means cheese, wines, perfume or any other staple items that we naturally associate with France. Let the French learn that Israel supporters will not be economically pinched without pushing back.”

The Jewish Voice’s editorial comes in the aftermath of Israeli Deputy Minister for Diplomacy Michael Oren’s Nov. 27 tweet that Israelis should “think twice” about purchasing French products. France’s government directed businesses to not use “Made in Israel” labels for products from Israeli companies in Judea, Samaria and the Golan Heights.

"The truth is, the anti-Semitism emanating from France is essentially endemic to the culture and society and has been for centuries. It is also the European hub of vitriol directed at the Jewish state," The Jewish Voice wrote.

Jewish Voice Publisher David Ben-Hooren told JNS.org that he is encouraging other media outlets to mirror his newspaper's call to boycott French products.

"I'm calling on other media companies to follow suit and create this awareness that we are not going to take this. We are not going to take this from France," Ben-Hooren said. "Let's not forget that America is a major market for French products, and I hope the mainstream media will take notice of it and join us."

From Tears to Triumph: Gayle Sassoon To Open Center in Honor of her Children
Written by Ofra Sarit
The Jewish Voice

Almost two years has passed since the tragic Brooklyn fire that took the 7 beautiful and pure Sassoon children from this world. The global community shook to consider the plight of the parents who would be forced to endure such a loss. Despite everything, driven by a special inner strength, Mrs. Gayle Sassoon expresses her desire to live, her appreciation to the public, and her wish to create meaning from the tragedy. "I want to turn tears into triumphs," she says.

March 21, 2015 was a cold Shabbat night, while Mrs. Sassoon and her children slept peacefully upstairs in their Flatbush home. Rav Gabriel Sassoon was away on a religious retreat. According to the NY Post, a malfunction in the electric hot plate sparked a fire which would soon engulf their home. Mrs. Sassoon woke and made every effort to get past the flames and reach her children. When she realized she could not, she and her 15-year old daughter Siporah jumped out the 2nd story window.

Despite her injuries, Mrs. Sassoon heroically ran across the street to get help for her children. FDNY Commissioner Daniel Nigro said that it would have been "impossible" for her to have saved them. That night 7 of her precious darling children- Yaakov, 5; Sara, 6; Moshe, 8; Yeshua, 10; Rivkah, 11; David, 12; and Eliane, 16 – perished from smoke inhalation and burns. May their memory be a blessing and may they rest in peace.

Mrs. Sassoon was placed in a medically induced coma and remained in the hospital for many months until she was finally released in the end of June. Till today Mrs. Sassoon's face is covered in an elastic

medical mask, to help heal her skin. She suffers from third-degree burns on 45% of her body. Her throat and lungs are damaged from the smoke. Siporah was in critical condition suffering from a broken shoulder and arm, burns and smoke inhalation. She was in the hospital for over a month.

After such earth shattering devastation, it would seem logical to give up and to succumb to the sadness that life had served her. But somehow, inexplicably Gayle Sassoon finds strength for a new dream. Her focus is now to create a family center, in honor of her children, on the site of their razed home. In her first public interview since the fire, Mrs. Sassoon told the NY Post, "What consoles me most is working on the positive — not lamenting on the negative."

The proposed center has already been designed by an architect, with seven pillars representing her seven children lost and a large atrium dedicated in honor of Siporah, the only Sassoon child to survive. Mrs. Sassoon's dream center includes separate men's and women's learning centers, a library, and other initiatives. She plans to incorporate photographs of her children, their toys and some of their artwork into the building's design. The facility will be open to all communities and will strive to provide necessary services and offer profound inspiration. "For anyone to think about my kids in a sad light, I couldn't sleep at night," Mrs. Sassoon said. "They were just so full of life and that's what I want this project to show."

Mrs. Sassoon has turned to public funding for the project. As of Monday evening, there were 577 contributions for a total of \$117,033 raised towards the goal of \$1 million for the center. Tax deductible contributions can be made at <https://www.gofundme.com/the-sassoon-7-project>.

Summary of the Perasha
Va'yetseh - Yaacov goes to Laban's house and builds a family

- 1- Hashem appears to Yaacov in a dream. Hashem promises him the land and many children.
- 2- Yaacov meets Rachel by the well. Laban lets Yaacov stay by him.
- 3- Yaacov works for Laban, marries Rachel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah and has 8 children
- 4- Leah gives Rachel the dudaim, Leah gives birth to Yisachar and Zevulun, Rachel gives birth to Yosef
- 5- Spotted goats, brown sheep, Yaacov gets his wages. Hashem tells him to leave Laban's house.

6- Yaacov leaves Laban's house. Rachel takes the terafim. Laban runs after them.
7- Laban and Yaacov make a peace treaty. Yaacov goes with his family to Erets Israel.

9 interesting/important Rashis in Parashat Va'yetsah

29:21a- Yaacov was 84 before he began having kids
29:25- Why only in the morning did Yaacov realize he married Leah? Rachel gave Leah the signs
29:27c- Yaakov married Rachel just 7 days after he married Leah
30:10a- Giving Yaakov Ziplah was part of the sketch
30:15b – Why Rachel didn't merit to be buried with Yaakov
30:21a- Dina was supposed to be a boy and Leah prayed that it should be a girl
30:22a- What did Hashem remember about Rachel? That she gave Leah the signs
30:27a- Laban was blessed to have a son because of Yaacov
31:13c- Yaakov delayed in bringing the korban he promised.

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

“And Ya’akob departed from Beer-Sheba.” (Beresheet 28:10)

Ya’akob left his father’s house to run away from Esav and to find a wife. Rashi explains: “It need only have written ‘And Jacob went to Haran.’ Why does it mention his departure? But it tells us that the departure of a righteous person from a place makes an impression, for at the time that a righteous person is in a city, he is its magnificence, he is its splendor, he is its grandeur. Once he has departed from there, its magnificence has gone away, its splendor has gone away, its grandeur has gone away.”

Rabbi Obadiah Yosef zt”l asks: Why, when Ya’akob left, did all of the grandeur leave? After all, Yitzhak and Ribkah, both of them great sadikim, remained in Beer-Sheba. If so, the grandeur was still there!

The answer is that the main goal of the sadik is to give merit to the people, that they should go from one level to the next. The sadik goes from the Bet Hakneset to the Bet Hamidrash to teach the people wisdom and knowledge, to light up the land with the honor of the Torah. Ya’akob Abinu accomplished this. We see in the Torah, it says that Ya’akob was perfect “and dwelled in the tents.” The word “tents” is in the plural. It doesn’t say he stayed in the tent, which is the singular term. This teaches us that he was moving among the many tents to teach the people Torah and halachah.

However, Yitzhak stayed in one tent because he was blind and could not see. Therefore, when

Ya’akob left, his leaving was felt immediately in the many synagogues and Midrashim. Rabbi Reuven Semah

“Ya’akob awakened from his sleep and he said 'surely Hashem is in this place...'" (Beresheet 28:16)

When Pharaoh awakened from his sleep, the Torah relates that he went back to sleep. The Rabbis point out that this is a typical difference between Ya’akob and Pharaoh. When Ya’akob awakens, he is immediately aware of the presence of Hashem and does something about it, whereas Pharaoh turns over and goes back to sleep!

In the last few years, we have seen and continued to see monumental and awesome events; natural disasters, political upheavals, besides many mind-boggling situations on an individual level. We must truthfully ask ourselves, are we "just turning over" like the Pharaoh of old, or are we following in the footsteps of our father Ya’akob, and dedicating our lives to Hashem and the Torah? Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Real Value

Money, money, money. Some say it makes the world go ‘round. Many judge people by how much wealth they have accumulated. “He’s worth millions” is an often-heard value statement. Society has created a culture that esteems and respects material wealth. Good and bad, happy and unhappy, are measured by ownership of the “things” life has to offer. Society preaches that the more toys people have, the happier they must be.

A person may have a great deal of property, but that does not necessarily mean that the individual is worth a lot. For example, Shelomo Hamelech said: “Better dry bread and peacefulness with it, than a house full of meals eaten in strife (Mishlei 17:1). Meaning: Peace is more important than wealth.

Another example (from Shelomo Hamelech): “A good name is preferable to great wealth, benevolence to silver and gold” (Mishlei 22:1). A good reputation has unlimited value.

You may get caught up in the chase for the almighty dollar and all the things it can buy. If you do, think a moment and put things in perspective. Ask yourself: “Is what I am doing adding to my wealth or to my worth?” This assessment will increase your true value on a daily basis and, more importantly, for eternity. (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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G-d Always Knows Best

The Hid"ra (Rav Haim Yosef David Azulai, 1724-1806), in one of his books, cites a tradition describing Yaakov Abinu's experiences when he fled from home out of fear of his brother, Esav, who sought to kill his brother. The Midrash relates that Esav sent his son, Elifaz, to pursue Yaakov and kill him. But when Elifaz caught up to Yaakov and planned to murder him, Yaakov persuaded him that it would be immoral and he should desist. Elifaz insisted that he was bound to obey his father's command, and Yaakov told him that he should instead take all his money and belongings. A poor person is considered as though he is dead, and thus by seizing all of Yaakov's possessions, and leaving him penniless, Elifaz would be considered to have fulfilled his father's command without committing actual murder.

Elifaz agreed, and he took everything Yaakov had with him, including the clothing he was wearing.

Yaakov was left there without anything at all, not even with clothes. He had no choice but to go to a nearby river and go into the water, so he would at least be covered. As he was in the water, a wealthy nobleman passed by in his carriage and decided he would stop to swim in the river. He took off his clothes, went into the water, and drowned. Yaakov realized that a miracle had occurred. He left the water, put on the nobleman's clothing, and went to the yeshiva of Shem and Eber where he would learn for the next fourteen years.

Let us consider Yaakov Abinu's situation in those moments he spent in the river. He has just lost absolutely everything. Not only was he forced to flee for his life, and leave his family behind as he heads toward an uncertain future, but he had nothing at all, not even clothing to wear. The situation seemed hopeless, but he did not despair, and sure enough, God sent a miracle to save him.

The key for enduring difficult situations and problems is to remember that God only does what is good for us. If we can imagine this, God loves us even more than we love ourselves. As much as we want our lives to be good, God wants it even more. But He also knows far better than we do what is best for us. And this is why He will place us in situations that seem unfair and harsh. It is because somehow, for reasons that we do not and often cannot know, this is what is best for us. If we approach our lives with this perspective, we will never be broken by any crisis

that we face. Once we realize that God put us in that situation, and that He only wants the very best for us, we will remain strong and optimistic throughout the ordeal.

Yaakov's experiences also remind us that God has ways of extricating us from our problems that we cannot even imagine. When Yaakov contemplated his situation as he stood unclothed in the river, he could not have considered the likelihood that a wealthy nobleman would come along and drown in the river. But God has countless options at His disposal, far more than we can see when we assess the situation. When Beneh Yisrael found themselves trapped against the Sea of Reeds, they saw only two possibilities: proceeding into the water and drowning, and turning around and being killed by the Egyptians. They certainly did not consider the possibility that the sea would split into twelve lanes so they could cross through, and then the water would fall back on the Egyptian soldiers and kill them. But of course, as we know, this is precisely what happened.

We have much to learn from Yaakov about keeping our spirits up during difficult times. No situation is as hopeless as Yaakov's situation appeared to have been. But just as God intervened to help Yaakov, so is He capable of intervening to help all of us, no matter how unsolvable the problem might seem to be.

VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA

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Rabbi Wein
DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Part of the tradition of rabbinic jurisprudence is that courts of law should attempt at almost all costs to arrive at a compromise/arbitration decision rather than attempt to enforce the letter of the law. This is undoubtedly because of the fact that true justice is often beyond the abilities and capabilities of ordinary humans.

In all major decisions in life there are always, so to speak, winners and losers. This is certainly true when two adversarial parties are involved, and decisions must be rendered that apparently benefit one and damage the other. Also, there always is the question of the public good, the overall impression that the decision may make upon the general society, the question of precedent and future challenges and decisions. Because of all of these issues, Abraham

Lincoln so famously phrased it " a poor compromise settlement is always better than a good lawsuit." But people are rarely satisfied with compromises and settlements.

When questions of doctrine, policy, belief and ideology are intermixed with the specific issues of the case involved, then compromise is somehow viewed as being a betrayal of values and something to be avoided.

There are a number of issues on the front burner of Israeli news today that are illustrative of this fact. Is there any possibility of a just compromise regarding the settlement of Amona and its seemingly impending forced evacuation? What are the rights of the people living there for decades? What are the rights of those who claim that the settlement was built upon their land? What about the national political and international diplomatic consequences of the evacuation or the retention of settlement? There seems to be no compromise that would be acceptable to all and no matter what happens the issue will simmer for years to come.

There is a tendency, almost an unwritten rule, in Israeli criminal justice that plea bargains are the way to dispose of criminal cases. This is not an Israeli invention. The same is true for instance in the United States and perhaps in most Western countries operating under the rule of law. The plea bargain again usually satisfies no one. But because of the difficulties that the legal system poses, in pursuing the matter where a person is found guilty of a serious crime, the charges are often lessened and the punishment usually radically decreased.

Those people harmed by the crime itself are always outraged at the fact that the perpetrator, so to speak, got off so easy. Yet, the paralysis of the legal systems as they exist in the Western world and here in Israel almost dictate that the bargains are the necessary oil that lubricates the wheel's of justice in the court system.

Plea bargains are certainly practical answers to difficult matters. But they belie any sense of true justice and rarely if ever provide closure or satisfaction to the victims of criminal behavior. Once again the courts are forced to make a difficult choice between the practical and the moral, the temporary and the eternal.

All of this only serves to reemphasize to us the inadequacy of human wisdom and planning. The Talmud ruefully states that the Lord, so to speak, is busy righting the wrongs committed by well-meaning

but erroneous legal decisions of human courts. So it becomes the job of heaven somehow, to remove wealth from the fraudulent and provide for the defrauded when the human courts charged with that task are somehow unable to accomplish it correctly. Heaven apparently is a very busy place.

The competing thought in this matter of difficult decisions is that the Talmud teaches us that a judge can only base one's decision on what one's eyes see. One can only use one's best judgment to arrive at a decision. Whether or not that decision will ultimately prove to be the wise and correct one, the one that will stand the tests of time and circumstance and later knowledge and wisdom, is never known at the moment of decision.

Because of this, ultimate justice is rarely to be found in human affairs. We are too limited in our scope and vision to achieve that noble goal. The justification for all of the shortcuts that our legal system takes – compromises, plea bargains, etc. – is in order to somehow keep society moving, even with limited justice as a result.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Birth of the World's Oldest Hate

"Go and learn what Laban the Aramean sought to do to our father Jacob. Pharaoh made his decree only about the males whereas Laban sought to destroy everything." This passage from the Haggadah on Pesach – evidently based on this week's parsha – is extraordinarily difficult to understand.

First, it is a commentary on the phrase in Deuteronomy, *Arami oved avi*. As the overwhelming majority of commentators point out, the meaning of this phrase is "my father was a wandering Aramean", a reference either to Jacob, who escaped to Aram [Aram meaning Syria, a reference to Haran where Laban lived], or to Abraham, who left Aram in response to God's call to travel to the land of Canaan. It does not mean "an Aramean [Laban] tried to destroy my father." Some commentators read it this way, but almost certainly they only do so because of this passage in the Haggadah.

Second, nowhere in the parsha do we find that Laban actually tried to destroy Jacob. He deceived him, tried to exploit him, and chased after him when he fled. As he was about to catch up with Jacob, God appeared to him in a dream at night and said: 'Be very careful not to say anything, good or bad, to Jacob.' (Gen. 31:22). When Laban complains about the fact that Jacob was trying to escape, Jacob replies: "Twenty years now I have worked for you in your estate –

fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for some of your flocks. You changed my wages ten times!" (31:41). All this suggests that Laban behaved outrageously to Jacob, treating him like an unpaid labourer, almost a slave, but not that he tried to "destroy" him – to kill him as Pharaoh tried to kill all male Israelite children.

Third, the Haggadah and the seder service of which it is the text, is about how the Egyptians enslaved and practised slow genocide against the Israelites and how God saved them from slavery and death. Why seek to diminish this whole narrative by saying that, actually, Pharaoh's decree was not that bad, Laban's was worse. This seems to make no sense, either in terms of the central theme of the Haggadah or in relation to the actual facts as recorded in the biblical text.

How then are we to understand it?

Perhaps the answer is this. Laban's behaviour is the paradigm of anti-Semites through the ages. It was not so much what Laban did that the Haggadah is referring to, but what his behaviour gave rise to, in century after century. How so?

Laban begins by seeming like a friend. He offers Jacob refuge when he is in flight from Esau who has vowed to kill him. Yet it turns out that his behaviour is less generous than self-interested and calculating. Jacob works for him for seven years for Rachel. Then on the wedding night Laban substitutes Leah for Rachel, so that to marry Rachel, Jacob has to work another seven years. When Joseph is born to Rachel, Jacob tries to leave. Laban protests. Jacob works another six years, and then realises that the situation is untenable. Laban's sons are accusing him of getting rich at Laban's expense. Jacob senses that Laban himself is becoming hostile. Rachel and Leah agree, saying, "he treats us like strangers! He has sold us and spent the money!" (31:14-15).

Jacob realises that there is nothing he can do or say that will persuade Laban to let him leave. He has no choice but to escape. Laban then pursues him, and were it not for God's warning the night before he catches up with him, there is little doubt that he would have forced Jacob to return and live out the rest of his life as his unpaid labourer. As he says to Jacob the next day: "The daughters are my daughters! The sons are my sons! The flocks are my flocks! All that you see is mine!" (31:43). It turns out that everything he had ostensibly given Jacob, in his own mind he had not given at all.

Laban treats Jacob as his property, his slave. He is a

non-person. In his eyes Jacob has no rights, no independent existence. He has given Jacob his daughters in marriage but still claims that they and their children belong to him, not Jacob. He has given Jacob an agreement as to the animals that will be his as his wages, yet he still insists that "The flocks are my flocks."

What arouses his anger, his rage, is that Jacob maintains his dignity and independence. Faced with an impossible existence as his father-in-law's slave, Jacob always finds a way of carrying on. Yes he has been cheated of his beloved Rachel, but he works so that he can marry her too. Yes he has been forced to work for nothing, but he uses his superior knowledge of animal husbandry to propose a deal which will allow him to build flocks of his own that will allow him to maintain what is now a large family. Jacob refuses to be defeated. Hemmed in on all sides, he finds a way out. That is Jacob's greatness. His methods are not those he would have chosen in other circumstances. He has to outwit an extremely cunning adversary. But Jacob refuses to be defeated, or crushed and demoralised. In a seemingly impossible situation Jacob retains his dignity, independence and freedom. Jacob is no man's slave.

Laban is, in effect, the first anti-Semite. In age after age, Jews sought refuge from those, like Esau, who sought to kill them. The nations who gave them refuge seemed at first to be benefactors. But they demanded a price. They saw, in Jews, people who would make them rich. Wherever Jews went they brought prosperity to their hosts. Yet they refused to be mere chattels. They refused to be owned. They had their own identity and way of life; they insisted on the basic human right to be free. The host society then eventually turned against them. They claimed that Jews were exploiting them rather than what was in fact the case, that they were exploiting the Jews. And when Jews succeeded, they accused them of theft: "The flocks are my flocks! All that you see is mine!" They forgot that Jews had contributed massively to national prosperity. The fact that Jews had salvaged some self-respect, some independence, that they too had prospered, made them not just envious but angry. That was when it became dangerous to be a Jew.

Laban was the first to display this syndrome but not the last. It happened again in Egypt after the death of Joseph. It happened under the Greeks and Romans, the Christian and Muslim empires of the Middle Ages, the European nations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and after the Russian Revolution.

In her fascinating book *World on Fire*, Amy Chua

argues that ethnic hatred will always be directed by the host society against any conspicuously successful minority. All three conditions must be present.

[1] The hated group must be a minority or people will fear to attack it.

[2] It must be successful or people will not envy it, merely feel contempt for it.

[3] It must be conspicuous or people will not notice it.

Jews tended to fit all three. That is why they were hated. And it began with Jacob during his stay with Laban. He was a minority, outnumbered by Laban's family. He was successful, and it was conspicuous: you could see it by looking at his flocks.

What the sages are saying in the Haggadah now becomes clear. Pharaoh was a one-time enemy of the Jews, but Laban exists, in one form or another, in age after age. The syndrome still exists today. As Amy Chua notes, Israel in the context of the Middle East is a conspicuously successful minority. It is a small country, a minority; it is successful and it is conspicuously so. Somehow, in a tiny country with few natural resources, it has outshone its neighbours. The result is envy that becomes anger that becomes hate. Where did it begin? With Laban.

Put this way, we begin to see Jacob in a new light. Jacob stands for minorities and small nations everywhere. Jacob is the refusal to let large powers crush the few, the weak, the refugee. Jacob refuses to define himself as a slave, someone else's property. He maintains his inner dignity and freedom. He contributes to other people's prosperity but he defeats every attempt to be exploited. Jacob is the voice that says: I too am human. I too have rights. I too am free.

If Laban is the eternal paradigm of hatred of conspicuously successful minorities, then Jacob is the eternal paradigm of the human capacity to survive the hatred of others. In this strange way Jacob becomes the voice of hope in the conversation of humankind, the living proof that hate never wins the final victory; freedom does.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"This time I shall praise Hashem, therefore she called his name Yehudah" (29:35)

When our Mother Leah said: "This time, I shall praise G-d", she did not merely mean the praise for giving

her another son. This son, Yehudah, was to become the entire Jewish nation. Since the end of the First Sanctuary our people have been called Yehudim because their majority was the seed of Judah. The name Yehudah was a prophecy.

What did Hashem see in Yehuda, or his family, that he deserved to become the Jewish nation?

The word 'Yehudah' means "He shall praise". The name of Hashem is included in 'Yehudah'. Yehuda shall praise G-d. The great function of the Jewish nation is to give thanks to Hashem constantly. "It is good to give thanks to the L-rd, to sing to Your name, O Most High" (Tehillim 92:2). The Yehudim are the Nation whose purpose is to Thank Hashem. This is a career for life and there is none better.

'Hakarat hatob', recognizing & acknowledging the bountiful blessings we possess and constantly receive, is the way of expressing our gratitude. By examining all of the good things we've been given as well as the wondrous world around us, this contemplation will bring us to a feeling of joy.

"You've made me happy Hashem with Your handiwork, I sing at the deeds of Your hands." It's a wonderful and marvelous world! Look at the beautiful sky. Isn't it a wonderful day? We have to teach ourselves the happiness of life. Life is happy and Hashem wants us to enjoy this great gift of Olam Hazeah (This world).

"Olam hesed yibaneh" (Tehillim 89:3). The world is built on Kindliness. We have a kindly Father. Instead of complaining and ignoring all the blessings He is showering on us, let's utilize the opportunity of life to sing of the deeds of Hashem's Hands.

With this extreme Joy & Love we will elevate ourselves to a higher level of our function as Yehudim (the ones who thank G-d), by thanking Hashem for all the gifts He bestows on us "BeSimcha".

Adapted From "The Beginning" "Sing You Righteous" By R' Miller ZT'L