

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYESSE

NOVEMBER 9, 2013

9 KISLEV 5774

DEDICATIONS: In memory of Sarah Mizrahi – 9 Kislev
And Jimmy Azrak – 10 Kislev

Rabbi Colish is scheduled to be away this Shabbat
Candles and Mincha: 4:25 PM – From now til spring, Mincha is at candle lighting
SHABBAT 9:00 AM - Please say Shema at home by 8:24

New Shabbat Morning Children's Program with Morah Avital. For children ages 0 to 5. 10:30 to 11:30 in the playroom. And Shabbat Morning Kids Program with Nina upstairs in the Rabbi's study. Stories, Tefillah, Games, Snacks and more

KIDDUSH SPONSORED BY

Jack and Lilly in honor of Patti's Birthday - Abal 120

Beginning this Shabbat, we change to early Mincha. We will endeavor to start on time and complete Tefilah to finish by 11:15 so we can get a 20 minute class in between 11:40 and noon.

Mincha at Noon – Amidah not before 12:04

During the Winter Schedule, we return for Arbit 15 minutes after Shabbat ends. We will B'H have a children's program each week alternating between game night and movie night with pizza forty five minutes after Shabbat ends

Shabbat Ends – 5:25 PM

Return for Arbit – 5:40 PM / Havdalah – 6:05 PM / Children's Program – 6:10 PM

Sephardic/Lido Member's Movie Night – 7:30 PM

Lido Beach Synagogue and The Sephardic Temple ... Are proud to present ... Motzel Shabbat, November 9 at 7:30 ... at Lido Beach Synagogue ... The Israeli Film The Matchmaker Donation \$5, Arik, a teenage boy growing up in Haifa in 1968, gets a job working for Yankele Bride, a matchmaker. Yankele, a mysterious Holocaust survivor, has an office in back of a movie theater that shows only love stories, run by a family of seven Romanian dwarves in the seedy area by the port. Yankele introduces Arik to a new world, built on the ruins of an old one. As Arik begins to learn the mysteries of the human heart through his work with Yankele, he falls in love with Tamara, his friend Beni's cousin. Tamara has just returned from America and is full of talk of women's rights, free love and rock and roll. The disparate parts of Arik's life collide in unexpected, often funny and very moving ways as he lives through a summer that changes him forever. Avi Neshet's latest film mixes comedy with drama as it tells a coming-of-age story unlike any you've ever seen before. –

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yenai – 7PM

We extend our condolences to the Osyatinsky Family on the loss of DAVID OSYATINSKY (David Ben Ephraim Z"L) Shiva continues through Sunday morning November 10th 2013 at the home of Osyatinsky 164 East Penn Street

We are changing the planned Friday night dinner for Erev Shabbat Hanukah/ Thanksgiving. Many people will be away. We will instead make this communal Shabbat dinner the week prior on Friday night November 22nd, Shabbat Vayesheb. Please join us.

It will be Chinese. RSVP a must to either Patti, Tina or email Hindy at hmizny@gmail.com. \$20 for those 10 and up \$ 10 for kids 3-9. Last year we had a Thanksgiving dinner on Friday night and it was a huge success. We would like everyone to prepare a minute or two of what Sandy Taught Me!

We are happy to announce that in addition to the Friday night dinner we are planning for November 22, Mr. Richard Altabe, Headmaster Yeshivat Shaare Torah in Brooklyn and former member of the Sephardic Shul, whose father was a past president and close friend of rabbi Abittan Z"L and whose mother designed the beautiful stain glass windows in the front of our Shul, will be joining us a scholar in residence for Shabbat November 22-23. Mr. Altabe will be speaking at the dinner and again shabbat during lunch. Please make sure to send in your reservations to Patti, Tina or email Hindy (hmizny@gmail.com). We look forward to a wonderful Shabbat together.

We will be having a Synagogue Hanuka party /Brunch Sunday morning Chanuka Sponsored by the Sisterhood. Details to Follow.
We are working on securing the recreation center field for Thursday morning Thanksgiving Football. Details to follow

Dr. Reeva Simon - Whose Jerusalem? The role of religion and politics in the history of Jerusalem. Motzeh Shabbat -Saturday night, December 14 at 7:30pm.

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Follow us on twitter @BenaiAsher for a daily dose of Torah, Israel or something of interest

Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100
 B'H, I will be in Florida this Shabbat

Editors Notes

We concluded last week's portion with Jacob being sent by his parents from the Holy Land. His mission in going up to Syria, is to find a wife. But there is more to the story than that. He is also fleeing from his brother Esav. The hope, is that over time his brothers anger will subside.

We can recall that when Abraham sent Eliezer to Syria to find a wife for Isaac, he sent him with 10 camels, servants, and many gifts. We can assume that Isaac and Rebekah would never have sent Jacob away with nothing. Yet when he arrives at Laban, he has nothing.

The midrash fills in the blanks. Esav assigned his son Eliphaz, the task of killing his brother. Jacob delays his trip by 14 years to study at the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. While at the Yeshiva, Jacob cannot be found.

As soon as he packs up and leaves, Eliphaz finds him. Jacob suggests to Eliphaz that he can fulfill his father's command without actually committing murder. A pauper who has nothing can be considered as dead. So Eliphaz takes everything; Jacob's money, his jewels, his gifts, and even his clothing and his shoes. When Jacob arrives in Syria, he has nothing more than the shirt on his back, a shirt that he managed to find along the way.

And so the portion continues describing the 22 years that Jacob lives in the house of Laban. Some consider Abraham's brief sojourn in Egypt out first exile. But I would think that Jacob's 22 years living in Aram under the thumb of his wicked father-in-law, is the sad prototype for the exiles which would come.

One must wonder, is exile a punishment or is exile a part of the Divine plan?

The Midrash commenting on the second verse of the Torah seems to suggest that exile was in the cards even before creation.

The earth was null (Babylonian exile) and void (Persian And Median exile) and there was darkness (Greek exile) upon the face of the deep (the lengthy Roman Exile) , and the spirit of God (the time of Mashiach) hovered above the water.

What is the purpose then of exile.

The Zohar teaches us that during creation, Holy Sparks were spread throughout the world. And it is our job to gather those sparks. Sometimes we find ourselves in the strangest of places and circumstances. Perhaps we were sent to gather sparks. By doing misvot, kind deeds and learning Torah we can purify and redeem those sparks.

Our role is to be the light onto the nations. As my friend Rabbi Winston explains: "As long as the Jewish people remained committed to this process, as evidenced by their commitment to Torah and mitzvot, then God arranged for all relevant sparks to be brought to the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. For example, during King Solomon's time (9th century BCE), nations came from far and wide to witness the great wisdom of this famous Jewish king, bearing great gifts....."

"However, in spite of this great success, the Jewish people eventually lost appreciation of their role in history and how easy God had made it for them. This was evident through their laxity in the learning of the Torah and performance of mitzvot Upon seeing this, God told the Jewish people: "If you don't appreciate how I've been bringing the sparks to you for redemption, then I will send you out to get them yourselves -- at your own peril!"

One way or another, it's up to us to gather these sparks from around the world. And that means going out into the world and attempting to truly become the light we were destined to become.

It's much easier to go out into the world when people like you and want you to come. The problem is that the Jewish people don't have the greatest PR campaign running. For a few years we were doing fine. But then it all seemed to head south and we find that there are often so many ill preconceived notions out there.

So how do we change that?

This Shabbat, Rabbi Elie Abadie hosted Rabbi Abraham Skorka. If you google him you'll read about a Pope and a Rabbi who celebrated their friendship by living in the Vatican together for several days, sharing all meals, on Shemini Aseret, Simcha Torah and Shabbat with Kiddush and kosher food and wine while discussing what more they can do together to promote dialogue and peace in the world. Rabbi Skorka told us stories and explained that he believed the answer lay in dialogue. There are few things that are more beneficial in building relationships than deep and meaningful dialogue.

But if you ask my daughter Mikhayla and her friends, they'll suggest another possible answer; a way to be a light into the nation, to gather sparks and to do much needed PR work. They'll tell you the answer lies in shoes.

There is something very special about shoes. Each morning when we say the blessing Shasah Li Kol Sorchi, thanking Hashem for fulfilling all our needs, it's the gift of shoes that we have in mind. The rabbis teach us that shoes are to the body as the body is to the soul.

After my father in law Jerry Werman passed away in March. Mikhayla and her friends decided to honor his memory and help to fulfill the dream of the ultimate shoe man by delivering new shoes to children in orphanages around the world.

Chasing Peace or Rodef Shalom does just that. They travel the world creating great Jewish PR and gathering sparks. Their clients are kids who come from all over, with different beliefs, religions, languages, appearance, and dress. Because in the end this is our world and the differences just don't matter.

But it's not just sending shoes. It's about a bunch of girls going to the places, meeting the kids, sitting with them, helping them to pick out their hand decorated shoes and socks. It's about the hugs, the tears of joy, the party they bring and the memories.

Their first trip was to Peru this summer. The shoes were donated by my cousin Jeffrey Deutsch. Each was hand decorated using the motifs of Rodef Shalom. Each child in each of the orphanages will probably never forget those Jewish girls who came and showed them they cared. One day they'll tell their children and grandchildren how this simplest of acts made such a huge difference. This is what Kiddush Hashem means. Visit their website and see the pictures and you'll see in the faces what can be accomplished with so little. I

am sure that these girls came back with many gathered sparks.

Other places they will be distributing this winter range from Thailand to Russia, from New York to Israel. Yes, there are sparks to be gathered and kids in need right here in New York and in the Holy land too. An amazing Bat Mitzvah project is arranging for 200 pairs of shoes to be decorated by the friends and family of the Bat Mitzvah and then distributed by the young girl and her family. This can be a project for a Synagogue or a school, one class or even a group of friends. You can be a part of this in so many ways. To learn more visit ChasingPeace.org or write to Info@chasingpeace.org. You can sponsor a trip, donate shoes or just buy a t shirt to support their efforts and to show some young ladies that we care. Mikhayla wrote that in today's age we tend to forget the people around us. We're so focused on the here, the now, and ourselves. We forget this place we call our world, we forget the seven billion other people, and we forget how one small act can make a difference. There are billions of sparks to be gathered. As Jacob went out into the world, so must we. There are many ways to fulfill our destiny of being a light to the nations. None of them includes locking the world out. As Rabbi Skorka notes, let's not be afraid to speak and exchange meaningful dialogue. As Mikhayla is teaching me, let's change the world by connecting with one child at a time. Won't you join us?

Shabbat Shalom
David Bibi

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: Yakov experiences the famed prophecy of "Jacob's Ladder".

2nd Aliya: Yakov arrives in Charan, encounters Rachel, and contracts with Lavan for her hand in marriage.

3rd Aliya: Lavan switches Leah for Rachel forcing Yakov to negotiate another 7 years of service for Rachel. Leah gives birth to Reuven, Shimon, Levi, and Yehudah. Rachel marries off Bilhah to Yakov who gives birth to Dan and Naftoli. Leah marries off Zilpah to Yakov, and she gives birth to Gad and Asher.

4th Aliya: Rachel contracts with Leah for Reuven's mandrakes, after which Leah gives birth to Yisachar and Zevulun. Rachel finally gives birth to Yoseph, and Yakov approaches Lavan to negotiate a proper salary for continued service.

5th Aliya: Yakov's uses his vast knowledge of nature and husbandry to amass a fortune in sheep and cattle. After 6 years he decides with Rachel and Leah to flee from Lavan.

6th Aliya: They flee and Lavan catches them. Hashem (G-d) intervenes and Yakov, while confronting Lavan for his years of duplicity, unwittingly curses Rachel.

7th Aliya: Yakov and Lavan separate and Yakov arrives at the border of Canaan in 2205.

The Haftorah for Parshas Vayeitzei is from Hosea 12:13-14:10. Following the death of Shlomo Hamelech, the kingdom was divided between his son Rechavam, and Yiravam ben Nivat from the tribe of Ephrayim. Yiravam was a man of extraordinary potential who had it within his power to join with Rechavam, unite the two kingdoms, and bring Mashiach. Instead, he enacted legislature that earned him the title Chotay U'machate - one who sins and causes others to sin. This is why he Talmud relished him among those individuals who have lost their portion in Olam Habaah - the World To Come. His greatest sin was erecting two golden calves, one in the north of Israel and one in the south of Israel, where the people were encouraged to serve the idols rather than go to the Bais Hamikdash. The prophet cried out against this terrible defection from Hashem and prophesied the destruction and exile of the 10 Tribes that followed Yiravam and the tribe of Ephrayim.

The relationship to our Parsha is obvious from the first Pasuk (verse) of the Haftorah that describes Yakov's journey to Aram in search of a wife. However, the connection is much more profound. As free willed creations, our decisions force Hashem to adjust events so that destiny is best accomplished. The end result will always be as Hashem intended, but the events leading to that moment can be more circuitous and convoluted than necessary. In the case of Yakov vs. Eisav and Yiravam vs. Rechavam, the actions of men forced Hashem to make accommodations. In each instance, a partnership could have been forged that would have strengthened the leadership of the nation and ushered in the Messianic era. Instead, Eisav and Yiravam refused to serve Hashem and distanced themselves and their generation from redemption.

The last Pasuk states clearly that there are many ways for destiny to be accomplished. Man's way, devoid of G-d, leads to pain, sorrow, and destruction. Hashem's way, which is righteous, proper, wise, and direct, leads to healing, love, and prosperity. The

ways of Hashem are pleasant, loving, caring, and respectful. Imagine how different history would have been, and how wonderful the future should be!

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

“And he named that place Bet-El; however, Luz was the city’s name originally.” (Beresheet 28:19)

The human being is an interesting creature. Man does not live forever, but constantly is seeking ways to make his name live forever. Sometimes man will erect a monument in his name. Some will build a city. Some will engrave their names in marble. Lately, one can go to a cemetery and see tombstones engraved with a picture of the face of the person.

Our perashah tells us about a city that Ya'akov named Bet-El, but, its original name was Luz. The Gemara (Sotah 46b) tells us that the Angel of Death didn't have permission to enter that town, and no person ever died in Luz!

Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l comments that in the days of Ya'akov Abinu the entire world had a great desire to move and live in the happy city of Luz. But, if this is true that it was such a delight to live there, the city should have grown tremendously, and forever. If there was a city protected from the Angel of Death, people from the four corners of the earth should have flocked there. People should be willing to pay any amount of money just to own a few feet of that city. But now there is no remnant of that city. Where is it? It no longer exists.

Ya'akov Abinu renamed the city Bet-El. He came to announce that anyone who wants that his name should live forever should know that every minute one uses for Torah, those minutes live forever and are everlasting. The name of that city is Bet-El, the House of Hashem, the four cubits of halachah. Ya'akov came to announce that they are mistaken to think Luz is a place you can live forever. There is no escape from the Angel of Death. Even in Luz the Gemara (Succah 53a) tells us that if the Angel of Death cannot come in, he gets the people to come to him. As the Gemara says, “a person's feet deliver him to the place.”

There is no city of eternal life. The only place that lives forever is Bet-El, the House of G-d. This is the house of Jacob, to connect with the Torah of Hashem, as the Mishnah says about the words “engraved” (,Ur"j) into the Tablets. Don't read it “engraved” (,Ur"j), but read it “freedom” (,Ur"j) from the Angel of Death. The only way to acquire everlasting life is by clinging to the Torah. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"And Ya'akob was afraid and he said, 'How awesome is this place.'" (Beresheet 28:17)

Ya'akob Abinu was traveling to Haran when he was suddenly plunged into darkness, and he lay down to sleep. At that point, he had a phenomenal dream where Hashem revealed Himself to Ya'akob, and promised him Divine protection until he would return to his father's home. The Midrash says that he also saw the future exiles and the final redemption in this dream. And yet, when Ya'akob wakes up, his first instinct is to cry out, "This is a holy place! Had I known that, I would not have slept here!" That means that Ya'akob would have given up all of the Divine revelations and the promise that he saw in the dream, because he wouldn't want to sleep in a holy place.

From here we see that the ends do not justify the means! If we talk in shul words of Torah during the time we are not allowed to speak, such as Kaddish, Hazarah or Sefer Torah, instead of getting a misvah, we are getting the opposite. We tend to justify our misdeeds by saying, "Hashem would want me to do this for this specific reason" and yet Ya'akob, our forefather, is teaching us that it's not worth the outcome if it means doing something wrong. Let's listen to Sefer Torah, Kaddish and Hazarah, and not talk about anything, and our Torah study will be enhanced by the fact that we are doing the right thing! Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

SMOOTH TRANSITION

It started out as a rainy day off from school. Many mothers had the identical plan to save the day: they would send their youngsters to the local theater, where a children's entertainer was appearing.

The little boys and girls were full of excitement as they entered the darkened theater and took their seats. For approximately two hours they sang and laughed along with the entertainer, enjoying every minute.

As they filed outside, chattering happily, the little ones instinctively raised their hands to shield their eyes from the bright afternoon sunlight that unexpectedly greeted them. The sudden change from dark to light was quite unpleasant.

The world is designed to avoid the discomfort of sudden changes in the environment. Those who live in the Temperate Zones may have very cold winters and very hot summers, but the Creator has built into nature pleasant transitional seasons to make the change a pleasure rather than a pain. As the season moves from fall to winter, you might notice that each month has an average temperature that is a little colder than that of the previous month. The leaves on the trees change color before they fall off – a few at a time – to reveal the bare branches of

winter. The beginning of each day, dawn, is a slow brightening of the nighttime sky before the sun rises to its full strength. The evening twilight consists of a slow increase in darkness until the night falls.

Spend some time thinking about other examples of slow transitions rather than stark contrasts, and you will be filled with gratitude to the Designer of our special world. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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MishnaBerura.com, LearnTorah.com

The Lesson of Yaakob's Prayer

The Torah in Parashat Vayeseh tells of Yaakob Abinu's escape from his brother, Esav, who was plotting to kill him. The verse states, "Va'yifga Ba'makom," which literally means that Yaakob "came upon a place." Our Sages, however, explain this phrase differently. Yaakob's travels took him passed the future site of the Bet Ha'mikdash, and he later realized that he had passed by the sacred site without stopping to pray. He immediately turned around and started making his way back toward Jerusalem, but G-d made a miracle and brought him immediately to the holy site, where he prayed. He thus instituted the nighttime Arbit prayer.

The Sifteh Hachamim commentary explains that according to this reading of the Pasuk, the phrase "Va'yifga Ba'makom" should be read as, "He prayed to Ha'Makom" – meaning, to G-d. We know that G-d has several names, including "Ha'Makom," which we use most famously at the Seder on Pesah ("Baruch Ha'Makom Baruch Hu"). The Torah here tells that Yaakob prayed to "Ha'Makom" at the future site of the Bet Ha'mikdash.

The word "Ha'Makom" literally means, "the place." Why would G-d be called by this name? What is meant by this reference to G-d as "Ha'Makom" – "the place"?

One explanation that has been given is that "Ha'Makom" refers to G-d's putting everyone and everything in the precise place where they need to be. The Name "Ha'Makom" conveys the critical message of faith, that whatever situation we find ourselves in, G-d has put us there for a reason. If a person is not where he wants to be in life, if he finds himself in a difficult position, he must know that G-d put him there, and there must be a good reason why.

This is why the reference to Hashem as "Ha'Makom" is used specifically in this context, in the description of Yaakob's prayer at the holy site of the Mikdash.

The Torah tells that Yaakov slept there “Ki Ba Ha’shemesh” – “because the sun set” – and the Sages explain that G-d made the sun set earlier than it was supposed to. This early sunset is symbolic of Yaakov’s situation at that moment. Until that time, for 63 years, he lived a peaceful, tranquil life, spending his time studying Torah and growing in his connection to Hashem. And now, suddenly, literally overnight, his entire life was plunged into darkness and uncertainty. He had to escape from his homeland and go live with his wily, corrupt uncle, Laban. Indeed, the sun set suddenly and unexpectedly. The joy and serenity that characterized Yaakov’s life came to an abrupt end.

And thus he prayed to “Ha’Makom,” recognizing that his situation was brought about by G-d. Yaakov understood that we must serve Hashem on His terms, not ours. Religious observance must not be limited to when the weather is fair, conditions are favorable, and we have plenty of time on our hands. Our commitment to G-d remains even when the sun suddenly sets, when life takes sharp, unexpected and unwanted turns, and when hardships abound. Even then, we must devotedly pray to and serve Hashem, recognizing that He, “Ha’Makom,” places us in whatever position we are in for a reason.

Rabbi Wein

The prophet bemoans that Jerusalem lacks people who are interested and inquire after her welfare. In a general sense that is the case regarding the State of Israel and Jerusalem today. There is a lot of interest in the world today regarding the Palestinians and their cause, of ending the existence of the Jewish state, one way or another.

The presentation of the historic and justified counter-claim of the over six million Jews who live in their homeland and to Israel’s right to exist is given short-shrift in the world, if not even ignored completely. The bias against Israel and the Jewish people in the media such as CNN, BBC, the New York Times and the other major media outlets is so ingrained that it has become part of their subconscious so that they are amazed and shocked and are in denial when this bias is sometimes and somehow actually brought to their attention.

There are almost never any positive articles or reporting about Israel and its people and accomplishments. Terrorists are merely militants and victims somehow always have it coming to them. Half of the European Jews have suffered overt anti-Semitism and the other half are too fearful to acknowledge that Europe does not really enjoy their

presence within their sanctimoniously enlightened societies.

Bluntly put, it is pretty lonely and even nasty to be a Jew in Europe today. The international minister of South Africa weeps that she cannot sleep at night after seeing a map of Palestine. She is certainly not concerned about Israel and Jerusalem, thereby fulfilling the doleful observation of the ancient Jewish prophet. Our welfare is not on the agenda of the world’s manifold do-gooders.

But this disdainful attitude, towards the welfare of the State of Israel and thus towards the Jews who live there, exists in the Jewish world as well. I have recently returned from an extended visit to Brazil and the United States. I may now be oversensitive to all of these matters – living in Jerusalem for seventeen years can make you oversensitive to many things – but I was and am deeply troubled by the fact that Israel is not really on anybody’s radar screen.

Naturally there is support for Israel in times of real crisis but in everyday Jewish life it does not register. To the alienated and assimilated Jewish world, which unfortunately is large in numbers, wealth and influence, Israel is somewhat of an embarrassment. It is too Jewish, too traditional, too conservative, too provincial and parochial for their broad, universal, liberal, hedonistic, pacifist worldview.

In the Orthodox world there are many motives advanced towards explaining this apathy within American religious Jewry towards Israel. These motives range from the fact that Israel is not religious enough (though America is?) to financial and educational difficulties.

Aliyah is therefore not an option for most religious American Jews and since that is the case, there exists a feeling that one would be somehow hypocritical to inject too much Israel consciousness into one’s everyday personal and communal life.

It is embarrassing to them as well to recite a prayer for Israel in their Sabbath service. Somehow it is preferable to ignore its existence - and ignoring its existence has taken on an aura of religious piety amongst many otherwise fine observant and very loyal Jews.

I think that the basic problem that underlies much of this apathetic attitude towards Israel is that according to many Israel should never have happened. That was the decree and stated opinion of many – but not all - great rabbinic leaders of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Eastern Europe. It is still

anathema to many that one should now say a century later that perhaps they were mistaken.

So, one must now pretend that it never really did happen or that somehow its existence is not really central to Jewish life, present or future. In the eyes of many, Israel is not a salvation for the Jewish people in our time, saving the remnants of the Holocaust and gathering in the exiles of the Jewish world, but is rather, somehow, the cause of the Holocaust and of our current troubles.

This skewed view of things, divorced from historical fact and logical reason, pervades sections of the religious world in America - and even here in Israel. That is why most children attending American Jewish day schools, yeshivot and seminaries are ignorant not only of Israel but of Hebrew, the Prophets, and Jewish history.

Rather, we have created for our coming generation a fanciful narrative of what once was and of what is supposed to now be. There is great danger in being an irrational people in a dangerous, inimical rational world. The prophets of Israel have warned us about this as well.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

What is it that made Jacob – not Abraham or Isaac or Moses – the true father of the Jewish people? We are the “congregation of Jacob,” “the children of Israel.” Jacob/Israel is the man whose name we bear. Yet Jacob did not begin the Jewish journey; Abraham did. Jacob faced no trial like that of Isaac at the binding. He did not lead the people out of Egypt or bring them the Torah. To be sure, all his children stayed within the faith, unlike Abraham or Isaac. But that simply pushes the question back one level. Why did he succeed where Abraham and Isaac failed?

It seems that the answer lies in this week’s parsha and the next. Jacob was the man whose greatest visions came to him when he was alone at night, far from home, fleeing from one danger to the next. In this week’s parsha, escaping from Esau, he stops and rests for the night with only stones to lie on and has an epiphany:

He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it ... When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.” (Gen. 28: 12-17)

In next week’s parsha, fleeing from Laban and terrified at the prospect of meeting Esau again, he wrestles alone at night with an unnamed stranger.

Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome” ... So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.” (Gen. 32: 29-31)

These are the decisive spiritual encounters of Jacob’s life, yet they happen in liminal space (the space between that is neither starting point nor destination), at a time when Jacob was at risk in both directions, where he came from and where he was going to. Yet it was at these points of maximal vulnerability that he encountered God and found the courage to continue despite all the hazards of the journey.

That is the strength Jacob bequeathed the Jewish people. What is remarkable is not merely that this one tiny people survived tragedies that would have spelled the end of any other people: the destruction of two temples, the Babylonian and Roman conquests, the expulsions, persecutions and pogroms of the Middle Ages, the rise of antisemitism in nineteenth century Europe and the Holocaust. After each cataclysm, it renewed itself, scaling new heights of achievement.

During the Babylonian exile it deepened its engagement with the Torah. After the Roman destruction of Jerusalem it produced the great literary monuments of the Oral Torah: Midrash, Mishnah and Gemara. During the Middle Ages it produced masterpieces of law and Torah commentary, poetry and philosophy. A mere three years after the Holocaust it proclaimed the state of Israel, the Jewish return to history after the darkest night of exile.

When I became Chief Rabbi I had to undergo a medical examination. The doctor put me on a treadmill, walking at a very brisk pace. “What are you testing?” I asked him. “How fast I can go, or how long?” “Neither,” he replied. “What I am testing is how long it takes, when you come off the treadmill, for your pulse to return to normal.” That is when I discovered that health is measured by the power of recovery. That is true for everyone, but doubly so for leaders and for the Jewish people, a nation of leaders (that, I believe, is what the phrase “a kingdom of priests” means).

Leaders suffer crises. That is a given of leadership. When Harold Macmillan, prime minister of Britain

between 1957 and 1963, was asked what was the most difficult aspect of his time in office, he replied, "Events, dear boy, events." Bad things happen, and when they do, the leader must take the strain so that others can sleep easily in their beds.

Leadership, especially in matters of the spirit, is deeply stressful. Four figures in Tanakh – Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah – actually pray to die rather than continue. Nor was this true only in the distant past. Abraham Lincoln suffered deep bouts of depression. So did Churchill, who called it his "black dog." Gandhi and Martin Luther King both attempted suicide in adolescence and experienced depressive illness in adult life. The same was true of many great creative artists, among them Michelangelo, Beethoven and Van Gogh.

Is it greatness that leads to moments of despair, or moments of despair that lead to greatness? Is it that those who lead internalize the stresses and tensions of their time? Or is it that those who are used to stress in their emotional lives find release in leading exceptional lives? There is no convincing answer to this in the literature thus far. But Jacob was a more emotionally volatile individual than either Abraham, who was often serene even in the face of great trials, or Isaac who was more than usually withdrawn. Jacob feared; Jacob loved; Jacob spent more of his time in exile than the other patriarchs. But Jacob endured and persisted. Of all the figures in Genesis, he is the great survivor.

The ability to survive and to recover is part of what it takes to be a leader. It is the willingness to live a life of risks that makes such individuals different from others. So said Theodor Roosevelt in one of the greatest speeches ever made on the subject:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat. (Theodor Roosevelt, Speech at the Sorbonne, April 23, 1910)

Jacob endured the rivalry of Esau, the resentment of Laban, the tension between his wives and children, the early death of his beloved Rachel and the loss, for twenty-two years, of his favourite son Joseph. He said to Pharaoh, "Few and hard have been the years of my life" (Gen. 47: 9). Yet on the way he "encountered" angels, and whether they were wrestling with him or climbing the ladder to heaven they lit the night with the aura of transcendence.

To try, to fall, to fear, and yet to keep going: that is what it takes to be a leader. That was Jacob, the man who at the lowest ebbs of his life had his greatest visions of heaven.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"And Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock..." (29:10)

The episode of the great stone which Jacob rolled off from the well occupies a remarkably large space in our Torah (29:2 to 29:10). One of the guidelines in the understanding of the Torah is the noting of the amount of space which is allotted to a matter.

The Torah describes Jacob's exceptional physical strength, demonstrated when he removed a great stone from the well without waiting for all the shepherds who usually are needed for the feat. What does the Torah mean to teach us about our great Father Jacob by revealing that he is physically powerful?

We have a misconception that Jacob was a 'milk-toast', a weakling. Now we see that in truth, he was really a very strong man.

Therefore, Jacob could have felled Esav or Lavan with one blow, if needed. However, rather than use his superior physical strength in self defense, Jacob exercised self-control.

"Derech erez kadma L'Torah", "Good character precedes the Torah".

We are learning good character from our Abot. The Torah wants us to learn the fundamental trait of self control/restraint through Jacob, who had the strength available but opted not to use it.

Despite the gifts of body and mind he was the paragon of humility. In all his dealings with Laban and later with Esav he never permitted himself the role of haughty sage or of aggressive strong man, but assumed the role of the humble and loyal worker.

Adapted From "The Beginning" "Behold A People"
By R' Miller Z'TL