

VaYeitzei

The Mission of Holiness A Holy Nation

A. Blessings Before Success

Yaakov left Beer Sheva and went to Charan. (Breishis 28:10)

At the beginning of the *parsha*, Yaakov is about to embark on a long and difficult journey. On this journey, over the course of twenty two years he will encounter many difficulties. He will struggle to find a wife, and build a family, struggle with Lavan and then again with Eisav. After encountering Eisav, Yaakov will have more troubles with his children Dina and Yosef.

Avraham and Yitzchak endured various struggles and challenges in their lives. After they succeeded, Hashem gave them blessings. The blessings only came though after they overcame certain challenges. The great blessings for Avraham came after he passed all of his ten tests, culminating with the *akeida*. With Yaakov, though, the order was reversed. He received blessings from Yitzchak, of *olam haze* and of *olam haba*, blessings of Eretz Yisrael, of children, nationhood, and of holiness. He received a wonderful blessing at the beginning of his personal exodus from Israel, in his vision of the angels on the ladder that stretched from heaven to earth. Hashem promised to protect him and return him to the holy Land of Israel.

Yaakov then embarked on his life's journey, eventually becoming Yisrael, the final founding father of the nation of Israel. Why do the blessings of Yaakov come before the major challenges in his life?

B. Two Styles of Leadership

In its discussion of this *parsha*, the Zohar opens with the *pasuk*, “*Ashrei shomrei mishpat osei tzedaka b'chol eis.*” Praised is a person who protects justice and does charity at all times. What does the Zohar mean with this *pasuk*? It wants to tell us that Yaakov is a protector of justice and a giver of charity. What are the meanings of these two great values, justice and charity? In Chassidic and Kabbalistic terms, they are called *gevura* and *chesed*. What are these two poles?

When the Jews lived in Eretz Yisrael, at different stages they employed two different styles of leadership. During the first stage of Jewish settlement of the Land of Israel, they were led by judges, *shoftim*, such as Boaz and Shmuel. They did not have a king. This situation continued for centuries. During this time, the judges were their leaders. Only after many hundreds of years came the transition to monarchy. The people asked Shmuel for a king. Shaul was the first king, followed by David and his dynasty. What is the nature of each of these two systems of government, the *shofet* judge, and the *melech* king?

C. The Shofet's Role

Shem Mishmuel teaches an important distinction. The *shoftim* were the leaders of the country for the first few hundred years. What happened during these years? The Jews settled the land and defeated their local enemies. The *shoftim*, though, did not lead the Jews in battles outside of the holy land. They

led the Jews only inside Israel itself. In contrast, David Hamelech was involved in wars outside of Israel. He expanded the borders of Israel into Syria and across the Jordan River, beyond the boundaries delineated in the Torah. The *shoftim* did not fight wars outside of Eretz Yisrael. Instead, their job was to preserve the Jewish character of the people within the land.

The *shofet* was responsible to make sure that the people upheld justice. He had to determine what's right is right and what's wrong is wrong. The Jewish people lived in the land of Israel, its God-given land. The *shofet* oversaw an internal system, focused within Israel, to make Israel operate properly. The shofet and the people then had no interest in the outside world. There were no ambassadors to outside countries, and no outside ambassadors were coming to Israel. The Jewish people lived in a cocoon within its own land. The *shofet* kept the "House of Israel" in order.

D. The Role of the King

What about the king? The king leads Israel beyond itself. The king of Israel interacted with other nations. He sent ambassadors to them and they to him. The best example of this is King Shlomo. Daily, foreign delegations would come to talk to him and to find out about him, among them the famous delegation of the Queen of Sheva. She came from Africa to meet Shlomo and perhaps even married him. Ethiopians today still claim that they come from Shlomo and the Queen of Sheva. Shlomo had a tremendous impact on the world outside Israel. Dignitaries and princes, kings and queens from all over the world all came to speak to him.

The nation of Israel had changed, from an insular people with an internal focus, to a nation-state that influenced others and spread Torah to the whole world. The reason Shlomo married princesses from other countries was because he felt that by marrying into foreign monarchies he could spread Torah and the word of Hashem to them. Shlomo had the spirit of Mashiach in him. For him, Israel was supposed to be a land and a people with a special Godly message for humanity.

E. Mamleches Kohanim

At Har Sinai, Hashem told us that He wanted us to be a *mamleches kohanim* and a *goy kadosh*. Priests are part of larger group. *Kohanim* are supposed to teach and inspire other people. If all of the people of Israel are called *mamleches kohanim*, who are they *kohanim* for? They are *kohanim* for the whole world, to inspire and teach the whole world about Hashem, and about the *mitzvos* of *bnei* Noach. Rambam says that if a non-Jew keeps the *bnei* Noach laws without ascribing them to the Torah, he is not called a *chassid*. He has to know that the idea of charity comes from Hashem. He has to know that being good, being a loyal husband or wife comes from Hashem. These values come from the Torah that Hashem gave to Bnei Yisrael. We are thus a *mamleches kohanim* in this mission to the world.

We also have to be a *goy kadosh*, which connotes separation from the rest of the world. We have two missions. While maintaining our separate identity, we are also charged to be part of the world, spreading Torah values to the world, acting for the nations as a model of closeness to Hashem.

We are living in an age in which Hashem has forced us to have a double role. In today's economy the Jew *is* part of the world. We don't live in ghettos anymore. We are part of a big small world. Through the internet and travel, Jews are found in every corner of the world, involved in a multitude of occupations. Jewish merchants, programmers, doctors, businessmen, writers, and thinkers are involved

in every aspect of humanity and of human existence. We are there because by design Hashem put us there. We are in the process of becoming a *mamleches kohanim*.

F. Goy Kadosh

While thriving as members of the world, we must remember that the internal holiness of the Jewish people is sacrosanct. It is first and foremost. We must be spiritually strong within and then bring this strength to the world. Hashem is now telling us, “My Jewish children you are ready to do this. I have taken you out of the ghetto and exposed you to everybody. You should strengthen yourselves internally through Torah, *mitzvos* and Jewish education. But *al tira avdi Yakov*, don't be afraid to go out into the world to bring the holy message of Hashem to everybody.” It is very important that as we participate in the world at large, that we serve as models for non-Jews. We must be the example of business ethics. We must avoid cheating. We have to avoid any fighting and *chilul* Hashem. This has a tremendously positive impact on others. We are *kohanim*. By keeping these principles, we demonstrate the sanctity of Hashem and of His people to the world.

V'ahavta es Hashem elokecha. Our chachamim said that this teaches us “*sheyehei shem shamayim misahev al yadecha*, God should become beloved through your actions.” This applies to our dealings both with Jews and with non-Jews. The rest of the world should say, “This is a nation of holy priests. They show through their behavior that we *all* can be better people.”

Shem Mishmuel explains the respective missions of *shofet* and *melech*. The *shofet* was an internal authority to make sure people acted as a *goy kadosh*. In contrast, *melech*, the king, is supposed to represent the Jewish people to the outside world, to create a *mamleches koahnim*, which brings God's message and holiness to the international community, and to radiate *kedusha* from the land of Israel to the rest of the world. This is why David and Shlomo Hamelech had so many interactions outside of the borders of Israel.

Our *parsha*, says the Zohar illustrates *mishpat* and *tzedaka*. *Mishpat* refers to internal justice, proper relationships within Israel, *bein adam lachaveiro*. *Tzedaka* means reaching out and showing what it means to serve Hashem. This is an act of *tzedaka* in the broader sense of the word. We are supposed to spread and share our most precious possession – our knowledge of Hashem.

G. The Dangers of Charan

While Yaakov lived in Beer Sheva, he was an *ish tam yoshev ohalim*, a simple Jew studying in the tent, in the yeshivos of Shem and Ever, of Yitzchak, and of Avraham. At that stage of his life he was like a *shofet*, developing himself internally.

When Yaakov left Beer Sheva to Charan he began a new era. Charan in Hebrew connotes anger, problems, and strife. The outside world was antithetical and inimical to Yaakov's values. He was going to a place full of enemies to everything that Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov stood for. They did every possible sin: *avoda zara*, murder, licentiousness, and theft. Yaakov was going to live with criminal number one, Lavan. The Sages say that Lavan had within him the spirit of Bilam. Bilam was a great sorcerer and a proponent of everything evil. His philosophy promoted crime, *avoda zara*, licentiousness and murder. This was Lavan. He was not a regular bad person. He was a philosopher and architect of all that was evil in that world. He was the progenitor of Bilam. On Pesach, we say Lavan was worse

then Paroh, who only wanted to kill Jewish boys. Lavan wanted to destroy everything.

Paroh was a physical enemy. But he didn't wage a campaign against the Jewish faith. He allowed the *Levi'im* to serve Hashem; they didn't have to be slaves. Paroh wanted to destroy the Jewish people physically. He enslaved the Jews. This was terrible. However, Paroh did not attack our religion. He even allowed us to have our own Kohanim and Leviim. He allowed the people to pray. He even allowed Bnei Yisrael at some point to have Shabbos. He was opposed to Jewish physical freedom. He certainly was evil. But not as evil as Lavan.

H. Lavan's opposition

Lavan wanted to destroy everything. He was the arch enemy of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. He philosophically believed in evil, that to curse and destroy was good as long as he got his way and succeeded. Lavan maintained an evil ideology of cruelty. Unbelievably, Lavan became Yaakov's father-in-law! Two of his daughters and another two girls from his house became wives of Yaakov.

At the end of the *parsha*, Lavan says “these boys are mine and these girls are mine.” He meant more than physically his. He meant that they were *spiritually* his. He wanted to destroy the children's faith. “How dare you take them away from my philosophy? How dare you change their beliefs? How dare you make them weak when I made them strong?” he ranted. Hitler and the Romans also claimed that the Jewish belief in Torah and *mitzvos* created weakness. Jews strongly believe in charity. In these wicked ideologies, however, charity is weakness. They claim that only the strong win the race and only the strong can be successful. “These are *my* children,” said Lavan. He wanted to uproot everything that Yaakov had built.

Yaakov, on his way to Charan was embarking upon a long and treacherous road, to bring Torah and *mitzvos* to the rest of the world, while all that world was opposed to it tooth and nail.

Avraham had to flee that world. He tried to teach there with some success, until Hashem commanded him to leave, *Lech lecha*. Avraham's rival, Nimrod, had the final victory in their battle. Hashem told Avraham, “You will succeed in Eretz Canaan.” Now, three generations later, Hashem tells Yaakov to go back to Charan. He will now succeed where Avraham had failed. Yaakov is going with his own strength and the strength of his father and grandfather. He is like a three legged stool that will not wobble or fall. Yaakov will succeed. He will bring Torah and *mitzvos* into Charan itself!

This is why Hashem blessed Yaakov before the trip. Yaakov needed the blessings to survive the test of Charan. And he deserved the blessings because Hashem knew that he would succeed.

I. Jews after the Holocaust

Isn't this the story of the Jewish people after the Holocaust? The Holocaust wiped out Jewish life from the cities, villages and ghettos of Europe, where many Jews led beautiful Jewish lives. The Holocaust destroyed that world and scattered the survivors, and we Jews became like tiny grains of sand on the beaches of a new wide world. We found ourselves in an inimical environment that was hostile to our values. When Jews came to the USA, they couldn't get a job if they weren't going to work on Shabbos. Shabbos was a work day. Jews who came in the first half of the 20th century were faced with an incredible challenge. “You will have no work if you won't work on Saturday!”

After World War II, when the poor, broken refugees came to America, they had to build Jewish schools and *yeshivos* for their children to become Torah Jews. As great as the opportunity is here in the US, tax dollars are spent on public schools, not on yeshivos. Jewish families are large. A Jew must pay for Torah education by himself. Some families have ten or more children, and the tuition bill is prohibitively expensive. The challenge we faced then and now has been to live in this new world, with many things opposed to our values.

But we came with a new mission: to remain loyal and to bring the message of Torah to this new strange world – to wear a *kipa* as a doctor in hospital, to wear *tzitzis* out as a lawyer in the courtroom, to spend money on children's education and not on a fancy car or vacation. This is our *vayeitzei Yaakov* to Charan. Yaakov left the protective cocoon of Yitzchak and Rivka. He went back to the furnace that nearly consumed Avraham. And so have we nowadays.

Hashem told Yaakov to leave, and He had confidence that Yaakov would become so spiritually great that he would be able to defeat the angel of Eisav. When Yaakov ran away from home, he couldn't even stand up to Eisav himself, no less to his angel. While Yaakov was away, Eisav built an empire. He established Edom, which later became Rome, and Eisav's descendants founded the Roman empire. What a builder he was! However, after twenty years in Charan, in hand to hand combat Yaakov defeated all of Eisav's spiritual might. Yaakov defeated Eisav's angel, the Satan. Yaakov derived this incredible strength through his two decades long struggle with Lavan, the great ideologue of evil.

J. Today's Charan

This is exactly our situation today. Even Jews who live in Israel are on the spiritual front line. Israel is now exposed to everything in the world culture, through TV, movies and the internet. Our physical enemies, the terrorists, may be on Israel's borders. However, Israel today is also Charan. It is not the simple place that Eretz Yisrael and Beersheva were for Yaakov. It is a Charan, full of strife, challenges and difficulties, forcing us into existential, spiritual battles.

Yaakov's succeeded in his expedition to Charan, and built a Jewish family of 12 children, a family of *tzadikim*. Yaakov showed us that we can build a *goy kadosh* and *mamleches kohanim* wherever we are.

This is the power of a *melech*. The king brings the holiness of *Am Yisrael* out into the world. The *melech* represents *zedaka*, kindness, and influence. During the first few centuries of Klal Yisrael's life in Israel, however, they were led by a *shofet*, who strengthened them internally, training them to become a *goy kadosh*. When the Jewish people were strong enough to bring the message of Torah and *mitzvos* to the rest of the world, the second stage of leadership began, the era of the kings. The Torah describes our nation as *mamleches kohanim*, because the king too is a *kohen*. The king is the teacher / leader of the Jewish nation on the world stage.

K. The Two Names: Yaakov and Yisrael

The name Yaakov implies narrowness. The root of the name Yaakov is *eikev*, meaning heel. The heel is narrow. The personality of Yaakov has a narrow focus, focusing only within. The name Yisrael however, comes from the word *sar*, an aristocrat, and connotes the openness of a king or ruler.

A Jew sometimes needs a narrow focus, and sometimes we have to have a broad universal focus. There are two instruments that are very important for a Jew, the microscope and the telescope. We need to have a detailed focus on *halacha*, to follow every *din* precisely. We must start Shabbos on time, not too late. We must say *Krias Shma* on time, in the morning and evening. We must be very careful with kosher food. We must be very careful within our families not to insult others. And if we do so we must beg forgiveness. We have to make sure that everything we do is proper. This is part of the microscopic focus of Yaakov.

A Jew must also have a telescope. We are part of a big wide world. People are looking at us. We have responsibility to make the world a better place. We have a *mitzva l'avda u'l'shamra*, the mission of Adam. We must work in the world and help develop it. Chassidische *sfarim* teach an interesting lesson. In Parshas Breishis, the Torah says Hashem created the world *la'asos*, "to do." The Chasidische *sfarim* teach that *la'asos* means that people must develop the world further. We have to conquer disease and eliminate poverty. We must eradicate man's injustice to his fellow man. We Jews, therefore, must be more involved than any other group. We are kings and priests, *melachim* and *kohanim*. Hashem has charged us with responsibility for the rest of humanity.

These are the two names of Yaakov and Yisrael. They come from two places, Beer Sheva and Charan. They connote two different emphases, the internal and the external. They are the expressions of the two missions Hashem gave us, to be a *goy kadosh* and a *mamleches kohanim*.

Chazal say these two names must always be used. At Matan Torah in Parshas Yisro, the name Yisrael is used much more often. Only once is the name Yaakov used, referring to the women of the nation, who are always supposed to be focused internally. However, when speaking to Bnei Yisrael, the Torah exclusively uses the name Yisrael, because we are supposed to influence the whole world through our actions. The Torah message is for the whole world. Let us pray that, *b'ezras Hashem*, we will successfully fulfill our mission, and the whole world will truly know Hashem.

May Hashem bless us and the whole world with His blessing: *From Tzion Torah will come forth, and Hashem's word from Yerushalayim!*

Questions:

- 1) What is unique about the timing of Yaakov's brachos?
- 2) What are the two forms of leadership that the Jews had in Eretz Yisrael? Explain them.
- 3) How is a Jew supposed to fulfill the mission of being a *mamleches kohanim*?
- 4) How is a Jew supposed to fulfill the mission of being a *goy kadosh*?
- 5) How do these two missions relate to the two styles of Jewish leadership?
- 6) What was dangerous about Charan?
- 7) Who was worse, Lavan or Paroh? Explain your answer.
- 8) Compare and contrast the names Yaakov and Yisrael.

Reflections:

- 1) Which is more comfortable for you, acting as a *mamleches kohanim*, or as a *goy kadosh*?
- 2) Describe a situation in which you acted according to the mission of *mamleches kohanim*. In what way did you fulfill the mission? Could you have done better?
- 3) Yaakov had Beer Sheva. Do you have a place where you feel you are free to enhance your

Jewish identity?

Exercises:

- 1) What can you do to make yourself more a member of our *goy kadosh*?
- 2) In what ways do you plan to bring the message of Hashem to the world?
- 3) For a week, write down actions that you have done to enhance your inner identity as a Jew.
- 4) For a week, write down actions you have done to bring Torah values and ideals into the outside world.