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Israel Belongs Nowhere: An Arab Taunt and Its Ancient History

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered November 23, 1974)

The Yalkut tells us that the stones that Jacob used as a pillow during his lonely flight from Esau were the very ones upon which his father Isaac was offered up at the Akedah.

How history repeats itself! We today rest on pillows of stone. I did not sleep well this past week or two. What Jew did not experience difficulty in sleeping during this time? We had a hard, cold feeling, under and in our heads--and in our hearts and in our stomachs. Make no mistake about it. Even as Jacob felt the stones and reminded himself of the near-death of Isaac, we feel today the specter of the Holocaust, the Akedah of the 20th century. It is a reality that lies just beneath the surface of all contemporary Jewish experience. So, like Jacob, we have the dread sensation of *כי בא השמש*, the sun is setting. Darkness is spreading and danger is abroad in the world.

How shall we respond to these worries? First, let us define the areas of concern. I find three such amongst others: self-doubt, fear of the future, and loneliness.

In these critical moments, Jews both in Israel and in the Diaspora do entertain doubts about the justice and worthwhileness of our cause. Of course, I am not speaking about the New Left and Trotzkyite Jews. I unequivocally and unambiguously condemn such Jewish self-haters who are open-minded to Arabs, close-minded to Jews; who can understand sympathetically every nationalism--except that of their own people. I do not refer to nationalism--except that of their own people. I do not refer to Communist Jews who slavishly follow Moscow's party line. They are an instance of psycho-pathology, the most pathetic example of political masochism in our times.

Rather, I refer to those Jews who are fully committed to the Jewish cause, who make their lives in Israel and put their lives on the line--and yet, ask themselves whether we have acted properly all along, whether it is possible to reconcile

our claims with Palestinian claims. Of course, every sane person recognizes that there can be no compromise with the PLO. You cannot reconcile the claims of life and death and end up with a condition that is neither one nor the other. But there is some incipient doubt as to whether our claim to all of Palestine is justified theoretically. And there is some nagging self doubt.

Such doubts occurred to Father Jacob. When we met him on that memorable night, he had his famous dream. And Abarbanel, who is the most psychologically oriented of all commentators, reminds us that dreams occur to people because of something that is stirring inside them. What was so disturbing Jacob that caused him to dream? Self-doubt, answers Abarbanel. The dream was a projection of his internal struggles and the divine prophetic response to them. Maybe, thought Jacob, I was wrong in taking away the blessings from Esau. True, he kept them only by deceit. True, had he gotten the blessings--by which is meant the right of his posterity to the land of Israel--it would have been a tragic miscarriage of the divine intent. But maybe I had no right to take it away from him. *אולי לא יישר בעיני אלקים*. Maybe it was not right in the eyes of God. And maybe it was simply not worthwhile! Here I am, away from my parents, all alone, cold and hungry and frightened. Was it worth it?

And so the divine answer came in a dream, in the form of a vision: *סולם מוצב ארצה וראשו מגיע השמימה* the ladder placed on earth (which according to the Midrash, held within itself, in concentrated form, all the land of Israel) and its top reaching into the heavens. God was saying to Jacob: Despite all your self-doubt, despite all your questioning of the morality of your conduct, you are connected to God. Still your doubts, remove your hesitation, your questions are resolved. In life, one must often make tragic choices--between a greater morality and a lesser morality, between a greater evil and a

lesser evil. You chose in this manner--and you were right, painful and tormenting though your deeds were.

I find it hard to understand the the thought of a moral justification for the Palestinian calim--especially when such claims are pressed by the likes of the PLO, who are nothing more than common gangsters. Nevertheless, Jews are morally sensitive, and if they are not, they ought to be. Therefore, even in upbuilding Eretz Israel, we know that its function must be to bring blessing to all humankind. No matter how much the majority of humanity seems arrayed against us, we shall never forfeit our function and our role of enhancing life for all men on earth. For so did God tell Jacob in that vision: ויברכו בך כל משפחות האדמה ובורעך *“and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your children.”*

The second area of concern is the simple apprehension of the future. We experience fear of the unknown. You will notice this if you visited Israel recently, if you talked to Israelis by phone or by mail or read their literature. We seem to be locked in an inexorable drive towards war. There is depression in Israel and in the Diaspora as well. We do not know how oil will affect our future. So we are caught in fear and in gloom and in anxiety.

We are, indeed, in the position which Jacob anticipated for us: pursued, hated, frightened.

And so, in response, Jacob dreams his dream. According to Ramban, the dream consists primarily of angels to teach Jacob one most important principle: that all that is happening to him is מן השמים, the providential acts of Heaven. Nothing is mere happenstance. He must not feel that God has abandoned him, that he is at the mercy of purely mundane forces. The eye of God never closes. The angels are there.

I would add: the ways of God are mysterious and complex. The help He sends to His children does not come in straight lines, and in unimpeded spurts. There is advance and retreat, progress and pullback, triumph and defeat. The angels are עולים ויורדים, they ascend and descend. First they are עולים, they go up--leaving us here, on earth, with a feeling of being forsaken, abandoned, almost in despair. But eventually יורדים, they descend, and allow us to feel the direction of God's hand in history, the consolation of His presence.

So when we have these fears, when we worry about the future, when we are told by the so-called realists to think the unthinkable thoughts about the bleak future of

the State of Israel, we hear from across the centuries the comforting voice of God: הארץ אשר אתה שוכב עליה לך אתננה *“The land on which you lie, I have given to you.”*

Eretz Israel will remain ours, We shall prevail!

If we succumb to despair, we are only satisfying our enemies and carrying out their plan. Let there be no יאוש, no despair. Let there be no divisiveness, no fighting of Jew against Jew. Let there be only hard work--and hope!

Finally, there is the element of loneliness. In every instance in recent weeks, in every international form, we have been out-numbered and outvoted and isolated. We have been silenced and excoriated at the UN.

We are even unsure of the United States--and we certainly ought not take for granted a country whose highest military officer this past week delivered himself of a kind of anti-Semitic triade which is appropriate for a small-town hick. Our leading soldier seems to be the kind of man who has obtained his philosophy of American society from the scrawlings on walls, and whose level of sophistication does not rise beyond that of the country-club locker-room.

Only a small handful of countries ever votes with us. Many others think that they are virtuous and heroic and pure if they abstain while the Arabs and communists and Third World gang up on us in the diplomatic equivalent of a gang rape.

The nadir was reached yesterday or the day before. It took place after the vote in UNESCO--the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization--which decided that Israel was the only country in the world which had to remain alone, and did not have the right to join with any region or bloc of nations. After this vote, the Lebanese delegate said the following: “Israel is a state which belongs nowhere, because it comes from nowhere.”

We belong nowhere because we come from nowhere ...

I confess, I was not completely shocked at this obscene taunt, at this cruel gloating.

Outraged, yes; but not shocked.

I recognize it. Smell it carefully and you will detect the whiff of an ancient malodorous theory. We belong nowhere--it is the old Christian canard condemning the Jewish people to eternal homelessness as the “Wandering Jew.” We have here--remarkably, in the words of a Lebanese Arab who represents a country evenly divided between Christian and Moslem-- the ultimate synthesis of discredited and evil Christian theology with malicious and manipulative Arab politics.

The old anti-Semitism has been resurrected in the hall of the UN. And the world fidgets, but does not raise its voice at this international replay of a Kitty Genovese murder.

So, "Israel is a state which belongs nowhere because it comes from nowhere!" How shall we answer that when our non-Jewish ask us whether there is anything to it? What should we say to those pathetically ignorant Jews who may be taken in by a statement of that sort?

Permit to suggest the following answers.

Israel comes from the concentration camps of Western Europe--which bloc it was not permitted to join by UNESCO.

Israel comes from the crematoria of Eastern Europe where the chimneys belched forth the smokey remains of six million men, women, and children--and the government of which today, all Communists, leeringly persecute the pitiful remainders of that unprecedented massacre.

Israel comes from the horrendous ghettos, where we did not have almost limitless real estate, and endless oil, only to fight for another piece of real estate--but where all we wanted was one place we can call our own, our home.

Israelis come from the mullahs and slums of Arab countries, where they experienced first-hand the blessings of what the Arabs mean by, "a democratic, secular state--a fraternity of Christian, Jew, and Moslem." They learned quite intimately what it means to live in a democratic state--such as Yemen or Syria; or a secular state--like Libya or Saudi Arabia ...

Israel comes from the people which created a Talmud, the most marvelous compendium of law and morality and justice and civilized life, while the Arab state still had no name, and were nothing more than pagan savages riding through the desert with knives in their teeth and blood dripping from their fingers.

Modern Israel comes from that nation of prophets who

blessed the world with the vision of a united humanity--a vision distorted and profaned, made pornographic and obscene, by that organization which today condemns Israel to be the only country not permitted to participate in that same unity of nations.

Israel comes from and is a people who taught the world pity and compassion, civilization and art and music, morality and law and justice--yes, and Education and Science and Culture--when the so called Third World is still populated by the likes of Amin and gives thunderous ovations to an Arafat.

Israel is descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who taught the world what it needs to deserve survival. And, if, indeed, Israel does not belong to this world, maybe the world just does not deserve to go on.

But we do belong. We belong not to Western Europe and not to the Communist bloc, not the Arabs and not the Afro-Asians. We do belong--to the Creator of Heaven and Earth. He is One God--"Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God the Lord is One"--and we are one people--"who is like unto Thy people, one people upon the earth." We are one nation not permitted to join any bloc of peoples. And He is One God who is above all pantheons, and does not belong to any bloc of pagan idols.

And therefore, to us as to our Father Jacob before us, comes the word of God as we feel rejected by the society of nations: והנה אנכי עמך , "behold I shall be with thee." ושמרתיך , "and I will watch over thee in all ways that thou goest, for I will not forsake thee."

That is where we come from. That is whom we belong to.

The Wandering Jew has come home. Twenty six years ago. That is where he belongs.

And he shall not be driven out.

Ever.

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Serving Religion for Thanksgiving

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Modern-day democracies have transformed civilization by introducing innovative and powerful ideas, both about our personal lives as well as about the type of society we aim to establish. Overwhelmingly, the values of democracy harmonize with traditional Jewish religious values. Without question, the most indispensable value of democracy for Jews, is the

principle of freedom of religion. For the first time in two millennia, Jews have been allowed --under the protective eye of modern democracy--to freely worship our G-d and practice our rituals without fear of persecution or reprisal. Additionally, by guarding basic human rights, democracy preserves the dignity of human life in general --a sacred value within Judaism. Man is G-d's masterpiece and the

dignity of the human condition must be upheld as a tribute to G-d's "investment". Democracy also delivers a bold social vision: by allocating political authority through popular elections, democracy hopes to craft a more equal and fair society. This vision of a "level society of equal citizens" reflects the Torah's mandate to craft a society of justice and ethical behavior. The many overlaps between democratic values and religious values has inspired Jews to overwhelmingly embrace the concept of democracy, actively participate in the democratic process, and deeply engage in the general culture of democracy.

This week Americans will celebrate the holiday of Thanksgiving. This holiday enshrines numerous principles of democracy and morality. The values of Thanksgiving feel almost religious or sacred and Jews across the religious spectrum deeply identify with this holiday and its cultural practices. At its root, Thanksgiving is founded upon the value of gratitude and of acknowledging the assistance we received on the road to our triumphs and successes. Famously, the Rabenu Bachye an 11th century Spanish thinker, identified gratitude as the gateway to all religious thought and experience. Entitled people view their good fortunes as deserved and rarely sense their dependency on outside factors or the generosity of others; it is difficult for them to express gratitude to others. Their success is merely a "cashing in" on their natural license. Stalin once wrote that "gratitude is a sickness suffered by dogs"; certainly a moral degenerate and mass murderer such as Stalin would disdain the trait of gratitude. By contrast, humble and modest individuals appreciate the fragility of the human condition and the underlying state of dependency under which we all operate. Admitting our dependency heightens our reliance upon G-d and intensifies our faith in G-d. Additionally, on an interpersonal plain, gratitude helps us better treasure our success and hopefully more freely share them with others. Entitlement often leads to greediness while gratitude pries open the doors of selfishness and egocentrism.

On Thanksgiving people aren't just grateful for personal prosperity; many also express gratitude for modern democracies in general. From its inception, the United States was a modern experiment in building a "city on the hill". Consequently, the success of this experiment has ripple effects across the globe, validating the value of democracy. Thanksgiving provides an opportunity to be thankful that we live in our world of relatively enlightened

forms of government.

Beyond the trait of gratitude, Thanksgiving is pivoted upon the value of family; traditionally families convene to celebrate this holiday. Sadly, the professional and cultural stressors of the modern world often afflict healthy family life. Life in our pressure-cooker known as the modern "city" tense and frazzled and the reassertion of family value on Thanksgiving is crucial. This "Thanksgiving" message about family also resonates deeply for Jews who have perennially consecrated the family setting as site of sanctity and service of G-d.

By highlighting these numerous quasi-religious values, Thanksgiving and its life-affirming values, reminds us of the enduring power of Judaism to enrich the human condition and ennoble our lives. Thanksgiving can help us better appreciate the manner in which our religion improves our station in life.

Is that all? Do we embrace religion solely because of the "human value" it offers? Do we only embrace the service of G-d because it improves the human condition? In addition to improving our lives, religion is meant to be transcendent – an encounter with a higher being on His terms. Judaism is a thrust into a higher realm – a leap into Heaven in ways which can't be articulated or justified solely for their human value. Perhaps the most iconic image of the entire book of Bereishit appears in this week's parsha: a ladder, anchored to earth but scaling the Heavens while angels ascend and descend. Have we pruned this ladder, retaining the lower rungs which are riveted to earth but cropping the upper tiers which penetrate the Heavens? Have we succeeded too well in anchoring religion to earth while amputating the steps of the ladder which are meant to catapult us to Heaven? Have we lost the transcendence of Judaism?

In many ways our generation has been guilty of leveling or grounding religion. In the wake of the Holocaust G-d seemed distant and fearsome. Additionally, the rapid technological changes of the post WWII world cast religion as ossified and irrelevant in a bristling new world of transportation, communication, science and space travel. Responding to these dual challenges – a G-d who felt distant and religion which seemed detached from our world – we reformed the way people viewed Judaism by redefining religion as beneficial to our lives and enriching to human interest. After all, Judaism could provide meaning, values, nobility, moral behavior, community, purpose, vision and

family life. Judaism and Torah study were showcased as a manner to fill the void in our modern lives, to reinforce family bonds, and to catalyze robust communal life. Judaism would heighten our moral conduct and improve our married life. In short, we dragged Judaism down from the Heaven and firmly fastened it to this world and to our human lives. Thankfully, we were highly successful and Judaism became popular and religious ambition more widespread. However, we paid a steep price as religion became an endless Thanksgiving meal!

What have we lost in this process? Have we lost the moments of transcendence when we take leave of this world and search for something higher and something

Believing in Our Abilities

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

One of the best predictors of whether I will attain a goal or not, is if I believe that my actions can bring about the desired results. Believing in my ability to accomplish something specific will help generate a goal, boost motivation, and increase the likelihood of success. This power of believing in our own abilities was first formulated in the psychological literature by Albert Bandura and is referred to as self-efficacy. Bandura understood self-efficacy to be domain specific, meaning that we have different beliefs in our abilities, depending on the type of ability in discussion. I may have high self-efficacy for writing but low self-efficacy for calculus. Later researchers suggested that there can also be a general self-efficacy that is not domain specific. This means that I can have a general belief in my ability to accomplish tasks and overcome barriers, regardless of what type of task it may be.

As Yaakov makes his way to Charan he dreams of angels ascending and descending to the heavens. This vision proves impactful as he comes to the realization that G-d was present in that place (“*Achein, yesh Hashem bamakom haze*”), a fact that until this point, he was apparently unaware (“*ve-anochi lo yadati*”). Rabbi Shimshon of Ostropoli, perhaps bothered by the assumption that Yaakov wouldn’t have realized the presence of Hashem before the dream, rereads this pasuk with a message related to self-efficacy. To fully understand the point, we first need some background.

In his vision of the throne of Hashem, Yechezkel

beyond? Has our entire language of Judaism been converted into mundane human terms? Does the term ‘*avodas Hashem*’—literally serving G-d without personal human resonance—resonate as loudly as the agenda of *tikkun ha’olam*—the prospect of employing Judaism to redeem the world at large? Do we think of Heaven and dream of angels, or are we trapped in the human sphere? Thanksgiving provides an opportunity to ponder the “human value” of Judaism and the supplementary values of modernity—each of which advances human progress. Parshat Vayetze reminds us not to flatten Judaism and to walk up the entire ladder until we reach the Heavens and encounter G-d in His sphere.

(10:14) describes seeing four faces; a cherub, a lion, an eagle, and a human. The Gemara in Chullin (91b) elaborates on Yaakov’s dream and suggests that the angels were going up and down, looking at the picture of the human’s face by the throne and comparing it to Yaakov’s face. Seeing the resemblance, they became jealous of his presence on the throne and wanted to harm him, so Hashem had to protect Yaakov. Rabbi Shimshon of Ostropoli suggests that Yaakov was previously aware that there were creatures that could reach elevated spiritual heights. He knew that the cherub, lion, and eagle had their place by the throne of Hashem, but he was not aware that his image was there as well. It wasn’t until the dream, where he saw the angels comparing the image on the throne with his face that he realized his true potential. In a brilliantly creative rereading of the pasuk, Rabbi Shimshon suggests that alluded to in Yaakov’s word choice is the discovery of self-efficacy. Yaakov already knew the spiritual potential of “*achein*,” in Hebrew spelled Aleph – Chof – Nun, representing the lion (*aryeh*, which begins with an *aleph*), cherub (which begins with a *chof*), and an eagle (*neshar*, which begins with a nun). Yet, until this dream, he was unaware of the spiritual potential of *anochi*, literally myself, and spelled *aleph – nun – chof – yud*, representing the three from “*achein*” with the addition of the *yud* for Yaakov.

This new-found self-efficacy was not domain specific. It was not just limited to spiritual pursuits. Yaakov’s new attitude pervaded all his interactions, as is clear from the very next episode regarding the shepherds by the well. In

a powerful drasha (“The Stone on the Well – Boulder or Pebble?”), Rabbi Norman Lamm contrasts the attitude of the shepherds with that of Yaakov. When Yaakov asks the shepherds why they aren’t working, they respond that there is a giant stone covering the well and until more people come to help push it off, “*lo nuchal*” – they just can’t do it. They don’t believe in their ability, so they don’t even try. Yaakov, believing in his ability to accomplish, walks over to the stone, tries, and succeeds in removing it from the well.

Yaakov’s True Brothers

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

Though Yaakov left his shattered family behind in Be’er Sheva, the spectre of his estranged brother continued to stalk him in Charan. Our parshah contains an unusually concentrated and varied use of the Hebrew word *ach*, which we normally translate as “brother”. When Yaakov arrives in Charan he encounters some shepherds waiting with their flocks by a well. He asks them “my brothers (*achai*), where are you from?” (Bereishit 29:4) Moments later when Rachel arrives with Lavan’s sheep Yaakov is energized by the sight of “the daughter of Lavan, the brother (*achi*) of his mother” (29:10), and he singlehandedly removes the massive stone covering the well to water her sheep. This theme continues with Lavan’s reaction to the arrival of Yaakov “the son of his sister (*achoto*)” (29:13). Lavan refers to Yaakov as his “brother (*achi*)”, this time indicating a relative, when he invites him to name the price for his continued work (29:15). The emphasis on the word *achin* in this first part of the Lavan story depicts a Yaakov who, having left his family, is seeking brotherhood and familial attachment, and a Lavan who is ready to fill this role. As we know, this scenario, though it seems idyllic, was not. While he was Yaakov’s biological relative, Lavan certainly did not treat Yaakov equally as a brother. Despite Lavan’s initial offer to Yaakov to work for a fair wage, Lavan repeatedly denies Yaakov the opportunity to assert his own independence. The deceit of switching Leah for Rachel prevents Yaakov from choosing whom to marry. Subsequently Yaakov is blocked from earning personal profit in his work shepherding Lavan’s sheep. Only Yaakov’s insistence and Divine intervention change this. Lavan’s selfish and controlling nature is laid bare by his ultimate insistence, in reference to Yaakov’s family, that “the daughters are my

He believes in his ability to effect change, puts in the effort and succeeds.

How many areas of life—spiritual or otherwise—do we write-off as being too hard or not within our abilities? Perhaps if we learn this lesson from Yaakov, we can work on boosting our self-efficacy by realizing our potential, putting in the effort and increasing our chances of success and accomplishment.

daughters, the sons are my sons, the sheep are my sheep, and everything you see is mine” (31:43) Ultimately, the abuse, coupled with G-d’s insistence that Yaakov leave Charan, and his wives’ approval, push Yaakov to break away, and flee, from Lavan. Yaakov’s new attempt at brotherhood thus ends in failure. Does Yaakov ever resolve this lack of brotherhood? It certainly does not occur with Esav. Yaakov keeps the meeting in next week’s parshah intentionally brief and distances himself immediately. It seems clear that Yaakov views his differences with Esav on values and outlook to be insurmountable. However, another series of uses of the word *achin* in our parsha intimates an unlikely source of brotherhood. When Lavan chases after Yaakov he takes his relatives (*echav*) with him (31:23). After Lavan searches through Yaakov’s camp for stolen idols, Yaakov demands that Lavan place anything he found between “my brothers (*achai*) and your brothers (*achecha*)”. (31:37) Later when Yaakov is building a mound of rocks as part of his covenant with Lavan he calls his brothers (*echav*) to gather and place the stones; a distinction is drawn between Lavan’s relatives and Yaakov’s. But if Yaakov fled from Lavan with just his wives, children and servants, who are his “brothers”? A midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 74:13) states that Yaakov’s “brothers” are in fact his sons who, being similar to him in bravery and righteousness, were now deserving of this title. Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (*Ha’amek Davar* 31:46) notes the significance of using the term “brothers” instead of “sons” with reference to the children. Sons help their father out of obedience, but brothers act together without coercion, out of a shared sense of ethical purpose. Yaakov had raised children who, notwithstanding their varied personalities, had imbibed his values, shared his ideals, and

were ready to live by them independently. Yaakov's respect for his sons' independence continues throughout his life (consider especially the episode of Shechem). There is a tremendous lesson here in raising children. Aside from this however, it seems that in his children Yaakov had found

something of the brotherhood that had failed to materialize with Esav or Lavan. His relationship with his sons enabled the balance of unity in values and independence of thought and action that allow brothers to live and thrive together.

Developing A Personal Relationship with G-d

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Vayitzei, we learn of Yaakov's flight from Beer Sheva, en route to Charan, as he flees the wrath of his brother, Eisav. It is there, at the home of Lavan, that he will marry his four wives - Leah, Zilpah, Rachel and Bilhah - and father his children.

As the parsha opens, Yaakov finds himself alone in the dark, and as he sleeps, G-d appears to him. וַיַּחְלֹם, וְהִנֵּה סֹלָם. עלים וירידים מִצֵּב אֲרָצָה, וְרֹאשׁוֹ, מִגִּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם; וְהִנֵּה מִלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים, עלים וירידים - And he dreamt, and behold! a ladder set up on the ground and its top reached to heaven; and behold, angels of G-d were ascending and descending upon it (Bereishis 28:12). And in his first communication with Yaakov, Hashem says: אָנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ, וְאַלְקֵי יִצְחָק; הָאֲרֶץ, וְלָזָרְעָךְ - and behold G-d was standing over him, and He said, 'I am Hashem, the G-d of Avraham your father, and the G-d of Yitzchak, the land upon which you are lying to you I will give it and to your seed (Bereishis 28:13).

Here, as Hashem first reveals himself to our third patriarch, the bechir she'b'avos (the choicest of the patriarchs), His first words are: I am the G-d of your father Avraham, and the G-d of Yitzchak. Yaakov will carry on the legacy and community began by his father and grandfather, as he journeys forward to begin his own family.

It is noteworthy that in the context of Hashem's first communications with Yitzchak, He says: אָנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם, אָבִיךָ; כִּי-אֶתְּךָ אָנֹכִי, וּבְרַכְתִּיךָ וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת-זָרְעֶךָ, בְּעֵבֹר אַבְרָהָם, I am the G-d of Avraham your father, do not be afraid, for I am with you, and I will bless you and increase your seed, for the sake of Avraham my servant (26:24). Here, In the aftermath of Yitzchak re-digging the wells that his father Avraham had originally dug, Hashem refers to Himself as the G-d of Avraham, but not the G-d of Yitzchak himself. Furthermore, Hashem promises to bless Yitzchak only in the merit of Avraham.

Why there does Hashem refer to his relationship with

Avraham, but in our parsha, in the context of Yaakov's dream, does Hashem communicate as the G-d of Avraham and the G-d of Yitzchak?

Rav Soloveitchik zt'l teaches, "When G-d appeared to Yitzchak (Bereishis 26), G-d identified himself as the G-d of Avraham, but not the G-d of Yitzchak. (This is because) Yitzchak had not yet developed his approach to G-d the way Avraham had done. "And Yitzchak again dug the wells of water which they had dug in the days of his father, Avraham, and the Philistines had stopped them up after Avraham's death; and he gave them names like the names that his father had given them" (Bereishis 26:18).

"This is more than a story about wells. The Torah is teaching us that Yitzchak only drew water from the wells that his father had dug: he had not dug his own wells, he had not yet developed a unique religious approach. At this point G-d promised to bless Yitzchak and multiply his seed, but only for the sake of Avraham (v.24).

"Yitzchak realized that it was insufficient to reopen Avraham's wells; he had to dig his own. At the moment that he built his own altar and called in the name of G-d - developing an edifice and approach of his own - then G-d was no longer merely the G-d of Avraham. Later, when G-d appears to Yaakov, he identified Himself as the G-d of Yitzchak as well as the G-d of Avraham (Vayitzei, 28:13).

"The introduction to Shemoneh Esrei is phrased אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם, אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov, and not simply אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם, אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב, the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. This wording is meant to convey that Yitzchak and Yaakov did not merely reflect Avraham's worldview: they broadened and deepened it. Though based on Avraham's trailblazing, Yitzchak's and Yaakov's individual approaches to G-d were distinct" (Chumash Masores HaRav, Bereishis, p.196-197).

From here we learn a powerful and important lesson. Every Jew must receive the mesorah from the previous

generation, but at the same time, develop and cultivate a personal relationship with the RS"O, where He becomes my G-d, and not only the G-d of my fathers.

I once heard a beautiful vort told over by Rabbi Shay Schachter that illustrates this very idea. Every day, in Az Yashir (Pesukei d'Zimrah of Shachris), we say: זֶה קְלִי וְאַנְהוּ, אֵלֵקִי אָבִי וְאַרְמְמֶנְהוּ, this is my G-d and I will glorify Him; my father's G-d, and I will exalt Him (Shemos 15:2).

This pasuk encapsulates the two aspects of every Jew's essential relationship with Hashem. זֶה קְלִי וְאַנְהוּ - this is MY G-d and I will glorify him. It is each person's tafkid (duty) to forge his own path, within the parameters of Torah and halacha, to G-d and to personally relate to Him as only each individual can. Our talents, capabilities, thoughts, feelings, experiences, intelligence and life story

Building a Brotherhood

Yonatan Kurz

When Yaakov first arrives in Charan, he immediately asks the men nearby, "אתם מאין, אחי," "My brothers, where are you from?" Why does he call them "my brothers"? The Radak says that a person calls his neighbors and fellows אחי, even if he is not necessarily close to them. He goes on to add that even if a person does not know the individual with whom they are speaking, they should still refer to them as אחי, so that way they can engage in a literally friendly conversation. This is not the first time we see in the Torah that a person begins a conversation with others by saying אחי; in Parshas Vayeira, when the people of Sodom come to Lot's house to confront him about the angels, his first comment is "My brethren, please do not do evil." Even when the most immoral and iniquitous people in the world are being spoken to, they still get the respect of being referred to as someone's fellow.

Rabbeinu Bechaye gives a similar answer to this question posed in this week's parsha. He quotes a Gemara in Kerisus which says "לעולם תהא דעתו של אדם מעורבת" - "a person's temperament/disposition should always be pleasant toward people," and adds that Yaakov is simply acting with דרך חסידות and general piety.

Colloquially, the word "brother" is an informal term

are unlike any other person, and so, each person is a world unto himself. It is this unique person that connects to G-d as his personal G-d.

However, a Jew must never forget that he is but a link on the chain of our glorious mesorah, reaching all the way back to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. We build our unique and personal relationship with Hashem based on the relationship of our fathers and the teachings of the past generations: אֵלֵקִי אָבִי וְאַרְמְמֶנְהוּ, my father's G-d, and I will exalt Him.

With this dual understanding, each of us can truly come to strive to the highest heights of avodas Hashem.

May we be courageous enough to forge our own path in the present, as we receive from the past, so that we may continue to build the future.

of slang that is commonly used in a snide way when talking to someone in a degrading manner. In contrast, when said in Hebrew as "אחי", the phrase is often used accompanying a good-natured demeanor. This makes sense, as a person is literally calling the other person "my brother," which immediately creates a link between the two people and instantly generates a sense of cordiality. Obviously, Yiddishkeit places a strong emphasis on the value of brotherhood, especially with the classic phrase of "אחינו כל בית ישראל," and as we see in this week's parsha, all members of Klal Yisrael are intertwined through Yaakov.

In Pirkei Avos, Ben Zoma says, "איזהו מכובד? המכבד" - an honored person is one who honors others. It's crucial that whenever we speak to other people, especially for the first time, we give them the proper respect and warmth that they deserve. There is a saying, "treat people the way you would want to be treated," but a more fitting way to put it is "treat people the way they would want to be treated," as that is the way that a real G-d Hashem should act - thinking from the perspective of others, rather than from one's own perspective.