

Parshas Vayeitzei

## Singular Focus

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Yaakov *Avinu* sets out on his personal journey. After Hashem appears to him in a dream and tells him that He will be with him, Yaakov goes on to Aram Naharayim to find his *bashert*. The Torah tells us that he came to a field where everyone was grazing their sheep. The stone covering the well was extremely heavy, and it needed the joint efforts of all the shepherds to uncover it. Yaakov walked over and rolled over the stone himself. The rest of the story of Yaakov's *shidduch* and the family he builds follows from here.

At first glance, it seems that this was a feat of great strength; he was stronger than all the other shepherds combined, and therefore was able to remove this stone all by himself. We don't, however, find any other stories describing Yaakov as a strong man. He is not like Shimshon who is described in terms of his strength; this is the only story in Chumash about his strength. Why is it of any importance? Also, it appears that this feat is supposed to serve as the prelude to his marriage. How is this feat of strength meant to convey any type of prerequisite for his marriage?

As is well known, the three *Avos* are the building blocks of *Klal Yisroel*. They are not three discrete great individuals who together simply pooled their resources and thereby created *Klal Yisroel*. Each and every one of the *Avos* had a unique attribute which was a critical layer of the foundation of *Klal Yisroel*. Not only did each one have a unique attribute, but there was an order in which these foundation stones had to be put down. Avraham was the foundation, Yitzchak was the continuation, and Yaakov's attribute was the capstone that completed the foundation. What were these attributes?

Avraham's attribute was *chessed* / kindness, as is widely known. Kindness is the first step man takes in order to transcend his selfishness and physicality and bring out the divine elements latent in him. It expresses Hashem's unbound and unconditional love for us. Yitzhak is the second step, and is an embodiment of *middas hadin*, the attribute of "law" or "boundaries". This means that things given gratis are deficient, and only that which is earned is truly good. Thus, the entire corpus of Torah obligations and restriction, reward and punishment, are all part of this attribute. These two attributes are both essential, and yet pulling in opposite directions. This is true as well of many other attributes that tend to have two opposite poles that pull in different directions. So long as it remains that way, no good can possibly come out of it, because there is just a constant battle between conflicting directions. We therefore understand the critical need for the final piece of that foundation, and that is Yaakov's ability to bring together the different conflicting forces and focus them to a central goal. He takes both *chessed* and *din* and decides how much of each is needed in order to accomplish what is meant to be accomplished. The final product incorporates everything into it.

This is meaningful doubly. First of all, it is impossible to get something done if there are conflicting elements pulling at all sides and all times. Secondly, and perhaps more important, is the fact that our core belief is that Hashem is One. That means that everything in *avodas Hashem* needs to come together as one. Hashem has an extraordinary multitude of attributes with which He expresses Himself in the world, yet in totality it is one objective. So too, we Israel, whose job it is to reflect the divine in this world, need to express all the different facets of *avodas Hashem*, as seamless parts of one purpose.

Yaakov is about to marry two women who must be integrated in a way that they all become one seamless family. Yaakov is the only one of the *avos* to have two wives of equal standing that must find their rightful

place in the family. This is unlike Yitzchak who had but one wife, and Avrohom, whose other wife was sent off at some point.

Yaakov would have twelve children, each and every one of whom needed to be integrated seamlessly into *Klal Yisroel*. This, despite the various rivalries and frictions described in the *parshios*. This was unlike the children of Avrohom and Yitzchak, only one of which were a continuation of their legacy. The task of Yaakov, then, was to take disparate elements and place each one such that they become part of a greater whole which has one, and only one, clear and sharp focus.

My *rebbe*, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, explained that Yaakov's feat of rolling off the stone was not a feat of great strength. He would reference the *piyyut*, "*yichad libo, v'gallal even mei'al pi beer* - he gathered his heart together, and rolled the stone off the well". This means that Yaakov focused his entire self on that task and was thereby able to roll the stone off the well.

This teaches us that we can do tremendous things so long as we focus all our energy on the task. In martial arts of various kinds, such as karate, a person can deliver an extraordinarily powerful blow provided that he focuses all his energy on one spot. The same is true of a laser beam, and so on. Thus, Yaakov's feat was not one of expressing strength but rather expressing the integration of many disparate pieces into one most sharply focused element.

When we say *kriyas Shema* we proclaim the unity of Hashem. We start by saying "Hear, Israel." According to one opinion, "Israel" is referring to Yaakov *Avinu*, who is called Yisroel. The reason why it is Yisroel which we call upon is that the understanding of Hashem being one is reflected in the actions and accomplishments of Yaakov. In his life he was able to take the various disparate elements of *avodas Hashem* - i.e. Avrohom and Yitzchak, his two wives, his twelve children - and bring them together in a way that instead of just adding to each other, they integrated and focused together to establish *Malchus Shomayim*.

We too, could accomplish so much more if we were able to precisely pinpoint a singular goal, and focus all our resources to achieving that goal.