

FROM THE PRESIDENT

And Yaakov Left Be'er Sheva...

Rabbi Asher Lopatin

*When a righteous person
departs from a place it leaves
an impression... when he
leaves, its glory leaves, its
brilliance leaves, its beauty
leaves. – Rashi*



We are all still reeling from the tragic murder of four Torah Jews and a brave Druze police officer on Tuesday morning, November 18, in a synagogue in Har Nof. For me, the death of Rav Moshe Twersky, zt"l, hit particularly close to home. We were both graduates of Maimonides in Brookline, Massachusetts, and Rav Twersky's sister, brother, and mother all live right here in Riverdale. Rav Dov Linzer and I were in Israel last week and had the sad but meaningful *mitzvah* of visiting Rav Twersky's family at the *shiva*. The feeling that the world had lost a piece of its glory, brilliance, and beauty with the passing of such precious souls was everywhere.

In this week's *parasha*, Yaakov ventures forth from Be'er Sheva, leaving behind an incapacitated father and family anger and rancor from Esav and even Rivka, who perhaps has second thoughts about the fury she created. At the *shiva* for Rav Twersky, zt"l, it was clear what he leaves behind in this world: amazing children, an amazingly strong wife, and a brilliant, glorious Torah that will nourish the generations of Jews who will learn it and teach it. We talked to Rav Twersky's sons, about Maimonides, a school Rav Twersky's mother, Atara, had led and supported for decades, and we talked about their father's Torah and how it would live on through students loyal to his teachings. In leaving the *shiva* house, there was a deep sense of sadness with the pervading thought that "Rav Moshe, zt"l, has left our world." But, thank God, his family, his Torah, and the State of Israel are all strong, ready to continue his tradition and his teachings.

Israel has lost so many precious souls. It has lost so

much glory and brilliance. But having spent three days there in the midst of so much sadness, I say with confidence that our Holy Land is a place that devotes itself to those it has lost by continuing the glory of their lives, by not allowing those who have lived their lives in, and fought for, Israel to leave without an impact. The feeling in Israel is one of resilience: with every *neshama* that has been tragically taken away, someone else – a child, friend, student, or stranger – steps in, knowingly or unknowingly, to restore glory and brilliance to God's special land. That feeling was palpable as Rav Linzer and I visited eager students from Ma'ale Gilboa in the north and Be'er Sheva in the south. And we didn't even get as far north as Haifa or Karmiel, or as far south as Yerucham, where our own *musmakhim* and students are contributing to Israel's continued vibrancy. Israel is alive; Israel is glorious; Israel is forever committed to continuing the goodness that its precious souls started but were not able to complete.

Let us all, in our own ways, be part of the glorious and brilliant future of Israel. Let us learn the Torah of its righteous sages; let us visit, move there, and make an impact. Our rabbis say that Jerusalem, the place of the Holy Temple of this world, is perfectly aligned with the Temple in the heavens. May our Land continue to align its glory and brilliance with the precious souls in heaven. And may we continue to strive to support Israel, to promote its glory and beauty, and to show our father Yaakov that the land he left is growing stronger and greater through the efforts of his children and theirs, till the end of time.

FROM THE ROSH HaYESHIVA

Torat Imekha

Rabbi Dov Linzer

In the Torah story of Avraham's servant and his interaction with Rivka, her brother, and her mother, we saw that Padan Aram was a society with an unusual family structure. As a matrilineal society, households were comprised of the children of the same mother, and the head of the household was the oldest brother, perhaps at times working in conjunction with the matriarch. Although initially on a more subtle level, we encounter these differing societal realities again this week when Yaakov flees to Padan Aram to escape Esav and to seek a wife.



When Yaakov first encounters Rachel, it is Lavan, her father, who is the head of the family. This may suggest that the normal patriarchal configuration was operating, but this is not necessarily the case. Let us not forget that Lavan was the head of the family from the time that Rivka had been living there. Also, it is possible that Lavan's wife had died and that Rachel and Leah had no older brothers, thus leaving Lavan as head of the household (cf. Rashi, 29:12 and 30:27).

The significant evidence pointing to the matrilineal structure is the repeated reference to Lavan as Yaakov's mother's brother and, conversely, to Yaakov as Lavan's sister's son. This is repeated three times in one verse (29:10) and five to six times in verses 10–13, as well as the earlier references in 28:2 and 5. Consider what this means in a matrilineal society – as Lavan's sister, Rivka is considered part of the family of which he is the head. Her children, then, are ultimately part of his family. Yaakov is thus a quasi-son to Lavan. Hence, Lavan's declaration, "Behold you are my flesh and bones."

We now also understand the force of Lavan's claim when he catches up with Yaakov, fleeing to return to Canaan: "The daughters are my daughters and the sons are my sons and the flocks are my flocks; all that you see is mine" (31:43). This claim seems totally baseless until we realize that, from the matrilineal perspective, Yaakov was a member of his household, and thus, Yaakov's children and his wealth were, ultimately, all Lavan's.

It is also worth noting the frequent occurrence of the word "brother" in this *parasha* when referring to Lavan's relationship with Yaakov, Lavan's family members, and Yaakov's family members (see 29:12, 15; 31:23, 25, 32, 37, 46, 54). This is a strong indicator that the family was organized more laterally than vertically, that is, through the brother rather than through father.

All of this helps us to understand the events surrounding Yaakov's decision to return to his ancestral home. Once he realizes that it is time to leave, he calls Rachel and Leah out to the field to solicit their opinion (31:4). This is, in itself, unusual. While Avraham listened to Sarah and Yitzchak listened to Rivkah when they spoke up, this is our first example of a husband soliciting his wife's (or wives') opinion. Of course, given the role of women in this society, this makes sense. What also makes sense, as we have seen, is the difficulty that he faces in extracting himself from Padan Aram. Here he is part of his wives' household and part of Lavan's household as his nephew. Thus he is not in a position to bring them back with him to Canaan, his – the husband's – country.

The response of Rachel and Leah, perhaps the most puzzling part of this narrative, can now also be explained:

And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, "Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? Are we not counted of him strangers for he has sold us, and has quite devoured also our money?" (31:14-15).

We may first note that Rachel and Leah are outraged that it is clear that they will be denied a portion in their father's estate. They are obviously working on the assumption that they are fundamentally entitled to a portion of the inheritance. But why is this so? It was not until hundreds of years later, when the daughters of Tzafchad complained to Moshe, that daughters were sometimes (in the absence of sons) considered heirs to their father's estate. Clearly, in Padan Aram, things were different and daughters would inherit, not only sons.

They are also outraged that Lavan has sold them. What Lavan has done, they are saying, in receiving the fourteen years of labor from Yaakov, was not to marry them off, but to sell them for a price, to treat them as mere property. Again we may again ask – what is so unusual about this? The Torah, in many places refers to

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a *mohar* that was given from the groom to the father of the bride as a means of effecting the marriage with this woman (see Shemot 22:15-16). This was a large sum of money (50 shekel, see Devarim 22:29) and is understood by many scholars as a bride price, that is, a purchase price paid to the father. Assuming this is the correct meaning of the institution of *mohar* and that it was the norm, why are they so offended with having been treated this way?

The answer again lies in the different nature of their society. Such might very well be the practice in patriarchal societies, where women did not have a say and could be treated at times like property. This however was not the case here. Remember that Rivkah was asked her opinion about whether she wanted to marry Yitzchak. Also remember that, while Avraham's servant did give gifts to Rivkah's mother and brother, he did not give them a bride price. Thus, to ask for and receive a bride price was decidedly against the norms of their society, and they rightly objected to this treatment.

This then brings us to the last part of their statement. What did they mean when they said that Lavan had devoured their money? How is this different than stating that he had sold them? The answer lies in understanding that the *mohar* could function in two ways. In some societies it was undoubtedly a bride price, whereas in others it may have functioned as a proto-*ketuvah*, money held for the sake of the wife, money on which she could live in case her husband died or divorced her. In fact, Rashi understands this to be the general meaning of *mohar* in the Torah (Shemot, 22:15), and although that is debatable (Ramban, *ad. loc.*), it certainly served for the Rabbis as a model for the Rabbinic *ketuvah* (whose value was set at 200 zuz, the equivalent of the Biblical 50 shekel). In fact, the Yerushalmi (Ketuvot, 8:11) explains that the *ketuvah* was originally given up front to the father to hold onto, in escrow, for the bride, and only at a later stage did it become an outstanding debt of the husband to the wife.

It is possible, then, that the work that Yaakov did for Lavan was not seen initially by Rachel and Leah as a purchase of them. Perhaps it was a proto-*ketuvah mohar*; perhaps it would be banked for them for their future benefit. What made it clear that this was not the case was what Lavan had done with the money: he used it for himself! If that's what he did, then it is clear that this was not *ketuvah* money but rather a purchase price. In fact, the JPS translation phrases it exactly this way: "... that he has sold us and used up our purchase price." We know that he has sold us because he pocketed the money.

This explanation also clarifies the meaning of the word *nachriyot*, usually translated as "strangers." The word *nachri*, however, has another meaning, "foreigner." What they are saying is clear: Our father, Lavan, is treating us like foreigners, like we are from a different country, from a society which is patriarchal, from a society in which we have no rights. This is evident from the fact that he has sold us, the type of thing done to daughters in a patriarchal society. Given that, he will likewise disinherit us, again applying to us the rules that govern women in a foreign, patriarchal society.

If this is how things stand, Rachel and Leah are saying to Yaakov: The wealth that you have earned is yours, and you are free to return to your land. You and your property are not, in this patriarchal figuring, a part of Lavan's household. And as for us, if we are anyway being treated as members of a patriarchal society, then there is nothing keeping us here; we might as well go with you to the land of Canaan.

So begins Yaakov's return to Canaan. And while Yaakov was returning to a very different type of society than Padan Aram, an interesting hybridization was beginning. For the exact rights that Rachel and Leah felt robbed of – the right to inherit, the right to a *ketuvah*, and the right to participate in marriage instead of being sold into it – would ultimately become a part of the *halakhic* system, a part of our *mesorah*, a *mesoret avot* and a *mesoret imahot*, a tradition of our fathers and a tradition of our mothers.

GUEST D'VAR TORAH

Parashat Vayeitzei

Daniel Epstein (YCT '16)

Der mentsh trakht un Got lakht.

"Man plans and God laughs."

– Yiddish proverb



At the start of this week's *parasha* Yaakov is on the run. He is fleeing from his older brother Esav's wrath. Yaakov is compelled to leave the comfort of his home, putting his studies on hold. He is forced to go out into the world and work, get married, and raise a family.

Dikembe Mutombo entered Georgetown University intending to become a doctor in hopes of helping his fellow citizens in the Congo. Being more than seven feet tall, he was recruited to play for the college basketball team. Mutombo enjoyed a greatly successful basketball career and turned out to be one of the greatest shot blockers of all time, a skill underutilized in the medical profession.

He had thought that learning medicine was the best way he could help his people, but his plans changed. Blocking shots in the NBA was how Mutombo could help his people. His humanitarian efforts have had a huge impact on the health of people in the entire Congo region. Among his other projects, in 2007 Dikembe Mutombo helped open a 300 bed, \$29 million dollar hospital that employs hundreds of doctors.

Yaakov was forced to leave his path, to leave the comfort of his home and enter the "real world." He was forced to live with the wicked Lavan and work the land. Yaakov had not planned to work for Lavan and marry Rachel and Leah. We often have a plan for our lives that must be altered for one reason or another, but nothing happens by accident, and there are no coincidences.

"In life there are no wrong turns, only paths we had not known we were meant to walk." – Guy Gavriel