

SHABBAT LASHEM

THE VOICE OF
BNEI AKIVA UK
THE MOST WIDELY
DISTRIBUTED YOUTH TORAH
PERIODICAL IN THE UK



תנועת בני אקיבא
BNEI AKIVA UK

PARASHAT VAYETZEI | ISSUE 07

RAV AHARON HERSKOVITZ | RAV SHALIACH

As Yaakov Avinu is leaving his home in Eretz Yisrael this week, Hashem appears to him in his dream. In this vision, Hashem promises to give the land to Yaakov's descendants, to be with him, to protect him and to return him to this land. Yaakov is very affected by this vision, and as a result makes an oath to Hashem (Bereishit 28:20-22).

It is clear that the beginning of Yaakov's statement is setting a condition, stating that his vow will need to be fulfilled once the following conditions are fulfilled:

"Yaakov made a vow, saying "If God remains with me, and protects me on this path that I am going, and gives me food to eat and clothing to wear, and I return in peace to my father's house..."

It is also clear that the end of his statement is what Yaakov takes upon himself to fulfill once the conditions are fulfilled: "And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be a house for God, and I will tithe everything that You give me."

What is unclear is how to understand the clause in the middle: "והיה ה' לי - לאלוהים" "And the Lord will be my God." Is this part of the condition, or part of what Yaakov is vowing to do?

Rashi on the verse understands it to be a part of the condition: "And the Lord will be my God: [meaning] that His name will be upon me from beginning until end, that none of my descendants will be unfit." In other words, an additional condition that Yaakov is setting is that Hashem ensure that Yaakov's children turn out well; if this condition is fulfilled as well, then Yaakov will hold up his part of the deal.

However, the Ramban disagrees with Rashi's notion that this part of Yaakov's

statement is a condition. Instead, he posits that it is what Yaakov is accepting upon himself to do: "And the Lord will be my God: It is not a condition as Rashi says. Rather, it is a vow and its substance is 'If I return to my father's house, I will serve Hashem in the chosen land at the place of this stone, which will be for me a house of the Lord, and there I will separate tithes.' And there is in this matter a secret from that which they said (Ketubot 110b) "Whoever dwells in the land outside of Israel is like one with no Lord."

The Ramban here is discussing two different ways of understanding the promise Yaakov makes to serve Hashem. One is more clear-cut, the way we would normally understand serving Hashem: Yaakov will come back to this exact place and there serve Hashem. Just as Yaakov's descendants will bring sacrifices on this spot in the future, as part of the avodah in the Beit HaMikdash, so too Yaakov will do so upon his safe return from outside of the land of Israel.

However, the Ramban hints at a סוד, a secret, which is part of an idea that he expands upon elsewhere. In our Sages view, as expressed by various statements in the Talmud and elsewhere, the way that Hashem runs the world enables a truly direct connection with Him only in Eretz Yisrael. An existence in any other land does not allow for this direct connection, but rather partial and indirect connections. This is why they state (Ketubot 110b) that it is preferable for one to live in Eretz Yisrael even if they would be in majority non-Jewish city, as a person living in Eretz Yisrael is "similar to one who has a God." Shabbat Shalom.

Volume 24
Issue 07

November 25
Kislev 07
5778

Shabbat
Times

London
In: 15:46
Out: 16:52

Manchester
In: 15:41
Out: 16:48

Leeds
In: 15:37
Out: 16:44

Oxford
In: 15:45
Out: 16:52

Cambridge
In: 15:39
Out: 16:46

Bristol
In: 15:52
Out: 16:49

Birmingham
In: 15:44
Out: 16:52

Jerusalem
In: 15:56
Out: 17:52

HUMANS NOT ANGELS

ELI GAVENTA | CHINUCH WORKER

Parashat Vayetzei tells the eventful story of the marriages of Yaakov to Leah and Rachel. There are a variety of different ways to read this story. We can see it as a romantic tragedy where the star-crossed lovers are doomed to be kept apart by their circumstances or by an evil father-in-law. We can read it as a great romance and with the phrase 'love conquers all' we can be reminded that for Yaakov he can work for 7 years of hard labour and it will only seem like a few days to him – so great is his love for Rachel. (וַיַּעֲבֹד יַעֲקֹב בְּרַחֵל שְׁבַע) – Ber. 29:20). We can even read it as an epic of sibling jealousy and competition over an eligible bachelor. (The text explicitly calls attention to this dynamic later where we read that Rachel is jealous of Leah and her successful births - וַתִּרְא רַחֵל כִּי לֹא יֵלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב - Ber. 30:1).

The way in which we approach the text is dependent on how willing we are to read these foundational narratives with a critical eye. As a young Chanich the way I was taught these stories was to emphasise the righteousness of the Avot and Imahot and to cast Lavan as the evil manipulator; a clear black/white and good vs. evil story. The overarching principle for my teachers was that the Avot and Imahot are perfect role models and the text should be read in a way that emphasises this. This approach has legitimacy both as an educational methodology and as an expression of Chazal. As an educational approach it mimics the way that we relate to our parents and guardians, as the heroes in our lives who can do no wrong. As an expression of Chazal there is a clear trend to reread the stories of Tanach in a way that preserves the moral character of the Avot and Imahot. However I believe that

a more complex and critical approach to these texts is equally legitimate as an expression of Chazal and a more effective educational methodology.

This Shabbat across the country Chanichim and Madrichim are wrestling with exactly this question. The Choveret (educational handbook used each week by Roshim and Madrichim) argues that we should read these texts in a way that emphasises the human nature and fallibility of the characters. We should be willing to say that the Avot and Imahot sinned and did wrong. As an expression of Chazal we find many instances where commentators throughout our history have condemned these key characters. In Nedarim 32b Bnei Yisrael's exile to Egypt and the subsequent 210 years are blamed on Avraham's sin of questioning God. In Sotah 36b we are told that Yosef was intending to sin with the wife of Potiphar and actually went looking for her to do so. In Sanhedrin 38b Adam and Chava, specifically Adam, are read as having been 'kofer beikar' – 'rejecting a fundamental principle' – being a heretic.

As an educational approach I believe that it has the potential for creating more effective and realistic role models out of the Avot and Imahot: If Avraham sinned and did teshuva, it's not the end of world that I have sinned, because I can do teshuva too. If such a great figure as Avraham sinned, and he was still worthy of being the founder of our nation, then maybe I am still worthy and good even though I have sinned. In the same way that as we mature and grow as children our relationship with our parents change to a more complex understanding of their characters, so too our readings of these texts should reflect a more complex understanding as we grow.

In Vayetzei we have an example of this way of reading Tanach. When Yaakov discovers the act of trickery and confronts Lavan, Lavan offers a subtle critique of Yaakov. He makes it clear that “where we live, we don’t privilege the younger child over the older child” (וַיֹּאמֶר לָבוֹן לֹא־יִשְׁעָה כֵּן) (Ber. 29:26). This is a rebuke to Yaakov and almost a comeuppance for the way that he overrode Esav; putting the younger child before the older child. Indeed later in Yaakov’s life we read of how his own sons trick him in a similar way to how Yaakov tricked his own father; another instance of comeuppance. (Compare Ber. 27:9 to Ber. 37:31 and read in the context of Ber. 27:12).

If we are willing to read the texts critically Yaakov becomes a more human and relatable figure, somebody who perhaps didn’t go about the things the way he should have and perhaps gets his punishment or comeuppance for that. Perhaps it is even exactly this that makes him eligible for

being a founding father – his fallibility and his perseverance in the face of it.

It is of utmost importance that we relate to the figures in Tanach with respect, they are the founders of our religion and nation after all. However this respect does not mean that we cannot recognise that they are human still, just like us. Part of being human is sinning, it’s going to happen at some point in our lives. The question is how to respond to it when it does.

The Rebbe of Kotzk would say about the verse: “And you shall be holy people to me” (Shemot 22:6), that God, as it were, is saying here: “Angels I have in sufficient quantity; I am looking for human beings who will be holy people.” Human beings who are not perfect. May we all wrestle with the fallibility of our role models in Tanach and otherwise. May we all remember that to be human and to fail is perfectly ok.
Shabbat Shalom.

Israel Machane 2018/5778 applications launched this week! Check out the back page for more information.



DVAR HALACHA: WEEKLY QUESTION

Have a question? Please email rav@bauk.org or call Rav Aharon at 07976642135.

Question: I ate meat and would like to eat a pareve soup (with onions in it) that was cooked in a milky pot. Can I do that?

Answer: Halacha dictates that we wait a certain amount of time between eating meat and milk (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 89:1), and the custom is the same for waiting to eat milk after eating pareve food that was cooked together with meat (for example, potatoes cooked in the same dish as meat; Rama Y”D 89:3). However,

the Rama comments that this is only true if the pareve food was actually cooked with meat. If it was cooked in a meat dish (even if the dish was used for meat within 24 hours), there is no need to wait between eating it and eating something milky. Although the case the Rama discusses explicitly is eating actual milky food after eating pareve food cooked in a meat pot, the same is true of the converse as well: after eating actual meat it would be permitted to eat pareve food cooked in a milky pot, even if the pot was used for milky earlier that day.

ISRAEL MACHANE LAUNCH!

Israel Machane 5778 applications are now open! Bnei Akiva Israel Machane is BACK and better than ever.

This year, we are launching a brand new programme, with hikes, sites and experiences never before seen on Bnei Akiva Israel Machane before.

With highlights such as the Desert Experience, volunteering with Shalva National Children’s Center, water sports in Eilat and spending Shabbat with an Israeli family, Israel Machane is #MoreThanJustATour!!!!

Also, this year for the first time ever on Israel Machane you have the chance to #MakeItYourOwn by choosing one of

three tracks, each exploring a different part of Bnei Akiva’s Ideology - Am Yisrael, Eretz Yisrael and Torat Yisrael.

For three days during Israel Machane the groups will be reorganised giving you the opportunity to gain a deeper insight into an aspect of Israel, of your own choice.

Engage with Israel’s diverse cultures on the **Am Yisrael** track, explore the North through trekking from the Mediterranean to the Kinneret on the **Eretz Yisrael** track, or discover what makes Israel the Jewish State on the **Torat Yisrael** track.

Email israel@bauk.org or visit www.bauk.org/israel/ for more information and to receive a brochure!