

And Yaakov exited Beer Sheva (Gen. 28:10). Rashi explains that this teaches us that when a *tzadik* leaves a given place, his exit makes an impact on the place; for as long as the *tzadik* is in a city, he is the beauty, splendor, and glory of the city, when he leaves, the beauty, splendor, and glory also leave. The Ostrovzter Gaon adds (*Beis Meir, Parshas Veyeitzei* pg. 83, based on manuscripts of his student's notes) that Rashi's explanation is hinted to in the full *gematria* of the word *vayeitzei* (ויצא), for if one spells out the letters of the word *vayeitzei* (ויצא = 247), he reaches the same number as the *gematria* of the words "beauty, splendor, glory" (הוד, זיו, הדר = 247).

And Yaakov exited Beer Sheva, and he went to Charan (Gen. 28:10). When the Torah writes "to Charan" it says חרנה instead of the usual לחרן. Why does the Torah write it in this way? The name of Hashem which represents His attribute of "guarding" is יוה"ך, and is derived from the final letters of the words in the phrase (Ps. 91:11): "for His agents, He has commanded on your behalf" (כי מלאכיו יצוה לך). R. Avraham Yehoshua of Apta (*Ohev Yisroel, Likkutim Chadashim*) cites a Midrash¹ which states the following: "One who take leave of his friend should only depart with words of Halacha. What are 'words of Halacha'? [In case of a disagreement between] an individual and a plural consensus, the Halacha follows the plural consensus." The Apter Rov explains that one's departing words to his fellow should consist of this rule in Halachic decision-making because the first letters of the words in the phrase "an individual and a plural consensus, the Halacha follows the plural consensus" (יחיד ורבים הלכה כרבים) makes up the aforementioned name of Hashem which represents His guardianship of travelers. Similarly, it is related² in the name of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin that for this reason the Torah describes Yaakov journey to Charan as חרנה instead of לחרן because by doing so, the Torah has insured that all four letters of Hashem's special name would appear in the last two words of this verse (וילך חרנה). Indeed, the Vilna Gaon himself was reputed to have made sure to say "an individual and a plural consensus, the Halacha follows the plural consensus" when somebody came to him before travelling. In fact I once found that the Sefer Matamim (s.v. Chosson, 23 cited in Minhag Yisrael Torah, Even Haezer p. 130) writes that the custom was for a bride and groom, in the Yichud chamber, to eat soup, which is called *yoich* spelled יוה"ך. For this is the name that protects those embarking on great journeys, and the young man and woman are embarking on the great journey of married life, דרך גבר בעלמה.

¹ In the commentary *Ramasayim Tzofim* (to Tanna de-Vei Eliyahu Ch. 5, §39) and in *Agra de-Pirka* (§25) this passage is cited as being found in the Talmud Yerushalmi. See also *Pninim mi-Shulchan HaGra*.

² *Divrei Eliyahu (Likkutim, to Brachos)* and *Toras Gavriel* (here) by Rabbi Zev Gavriel Margolios.

And he encountered the place (Gen. 28:11). Chasam Sofer writes (*Toras Moshe* here, *Chiddushei Chasam Sofer* to Chullin 40a, and *Drashos Chasam Sofer* vol. 2, pg. 378) in the name of his teacher Rabbi Nosson Adler that originally the place of Holy Temple was simply an unassuming “place”. This is evident from the fact that when Avraham went there for the *Akedah* it says, “And he saw the place from afar” (Gen. 22:4). However, Avraham prayed that this inconspicuous “place” be given more significance, so it turned into a mountain (which is why he later calls the place of the *Akedah* a “mountain”, Gen. 22:14). In our case, Yaakov Avinu foresaw that the Holy Temple will be destroyed in the future and will lose its significance to some extent, so for that reason, the site of the Temple is once again called a “place” when Yaakov Avinu lodges there. Rabbi Heschel of Krakow (*Chanukas Ha-Torah* here) makes a similar observation). He notes that when Avraham Avinu called the site of the *Akedah* a mountain, he said “...that it shall be said today, on the Mountain of Hashem... (Gen. 22:14), as if to imply that only *today* this place became a mountain, but previously it was not a mountain. R. Heschel explains that this is significant because if the site had previously been a mountain, then it could be assumed to have been tainted with idolatry, as the Talmud says (*Avodah Zarah* 45a) that the Canaanite used every mountain and hilltop in the Holy Land for idolatrous purposes. However, if it only became a mountain *today*, then it was consecrated to Hashem before it was defiled through idolatry.³

And he lay down in that place (Gen. 28:11). The *Zohar* (vol. 1, 148b) explains that “And Yaakov exited” alludes to the exile whereby the Jewish People left the presence of the Holy Temple to be exiled amongst the nations. The Malbim (*Torah Ohr* here) cites this explanation and writes that in particular it refers to the last of the exiles, in which the soul of Yaakov himself will hover about with his descendants. He also cites a Midrash which connects Yaakov's exiting Beer Sheva (ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע) with the emptying of the Holy Land of its glory at the time of the destruction of the Holy Temple (ויצא מבת ציון כל הדרה), as related in Eicha 1:6.

And he dreamed—and behold—a ladder standing on the ground, and his top reaches the heavens (Gen. 28:12). The *Pnei Menachem* of Ger, asked his father the *Imrei Emes* “on what did Yaakov’s ladder lean?” His father responded, “My son, you have made a mistake.

³ See also *Shaar Yosef* to *Drashos Chasam Sofer* (vol. 2, p. 742) who writes that similar ideas appear in multiple places in the *Chasam Sofer*’s writings. He also adds that Avraham said, “it is not honorable for the King to dwell in the valley”, so he prayed for something to happen, and the site became a mountain.

This ladder was not propped up against anything in the world, rather the world itself was propped up against the ladder!”⁴

And behold Angels of God ascending and descending on it (Gen. 28:12). The Talmud states about dreams, “Matters of dreams do not make anything ascend and do not make anything descend [i.e. they are utterly meaningless]” (*Gittin* 52a). The Gerrer Rebbe (cited in *Likkutei Yehuda, Parshas Vayeitzei*) explains that the Talmud chose such wording in order to stress that *ordinary* dreams are meaningless, unlike Yaakov Avinu’s dream which was brimming with importance, where it did indeed involve things ascending and descending.

And behold Angels of God ascending and descending on it (Gen. 28:12). *Tosafos HaShaleim* (Vayetze pg. 99) writes that every person has four angels which constantly accompany him, as it says (Ps. 91:11): “for His agents, He has commanded on your behalf”. Two of those angels guard him during the day, and two at night. Those who guard him during the day go up to the Heavens at night, and write down everything he did during the day, and those who guard him during the night go up to the heavens at dawn to write down everything he did during the night. When Yaakov had this dream of the ladder, he saw the changing of the guard whence the angels of the day ascended the ladder and the angels of the night came down. See *Megadim Chadashim* (*Chagigah* 16a and *Bereishis* pg. 425) for more about this.

And Yaakov woke up from his sleep, and he said, ‘indeed there is Hashem in this place, and I did not know’ (Gen. 28:16). Rabbi Pinchas HaLevi Horowitz (*Panim Yafos* here) explains the statement of Hillel (*Sukkah* 53a), “If I am here, everything is here”. This means that a person must serve Hashem so much so that he no longer sees himself or others, he only sees Hashem. A person is meant to do what is right without considering what other people think. As long as somebody still sees himself and is focused on himself, then he will be mindful of everyone else and what they think. When Yaakov realized that Hashem was there, his realization of Hashem was so powerful, that he longer saw himself. Because of this, Yaakov said, *vaanochi lo yodati* “and I did not know” which can be read as “Myself—I do not know”. He saw only God and no one else, and this is what Hillel concluded “If I am not here, there no one else is here either.” Rabbi Heschel of Krakow (cited in *Chanukas HaTorah*) offers a different explanation of this verse. The Talmud says (*Brachos* 55b) that dreams are comprised of one’s thoughts from during the day. Therefore, explains the Talmud, a person never dreams of an elephant going through the eye of a needle, because he never thought

⁴ See *Bishvili Nivra HaOlam* by Rabbi Shmuel Brazil (pg. 22) for an explanation of this.

about that during the day. Accordingly, when Yaakov said, “indeed, there is Hashem in this place”, this means, as the Midrash points out, that Yaakov declared that without a doubt Hashem is in this place. Why was there no reason for doubt? Because “I did not know”. Meaning, Yaakov was saying because he had previously not had any reason to think that Hashem *was* in this particular place, he did not think about this during the previous day. If he then dreamt such a “preposterous” idea that he had not thought about during the day, it can only mean that his dream was a message from Above—thus validating the contents of his dream.⁵ R. Yaakov Katina (Korban Ha'ani to vayetze)⁶ records in the name of the Gaon HaKadosh of Apta, that it is well known that a picture of Yaakov Avinu is engraved on Hashem’s Throne of Honor above (see *Chullin* 91b⁷). Accordingly, when Yaakov Avinu said “indeed, there is Hashem in this place” the word “indeed” (אכן) serves as an acronym for “lion, eagle, and cherub” (אריה כרוב נשר), the three other pictures engraved on His throne. But when Yaakov Avinu saw the goings-on above in his dream, he saw that an image of himself is also engraved on the throne, so he said, “and I did not know”. The word for I (אנכי) is an acronym for “lion, eagle, cherub, Yaakov” (אריה נשר כרוב יעקב), because he did not previously know that his face appears on the throne.

And behold! Rachel was coming with the livestock that belonged to her father—for a shepherd was she (Gen. 29:9). Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (*Chochmas HaTorah, Parshas Vayetze* pg. 303) explains that the livestock in Rachel’s charge were no normal animals. Rather, they were special animals that were different from all others. He notes that the wording of this passage itself implies that these animals were different, because it says, “the livestock

⁵ Similarly, when Pharaoh told Joseph about his dream involving the thin horrible-looking cows, he said “I have never seen such cows like these in the entire Land of Egypt” (Gen. 41:19), which the *Yalkut Gershuni* (there) explains in the name of the *Kli Yakar* was meant to preempt the argument that Pharaoh’s dreams were result of his thoughts from the previous day, by saying he wouldn’t be dreaming about such ugly cows because they simply do not exist in Egypt.

⁶ See also *Mishnas Moshe* (to *Chagigah* 13b) cites the work Maasei David (to parshas Chukas) who cites this Korban Ani.

⁷ See also Ramban to Vayishlach 33:20, and Baal Haturim to Mishpatim 24:10.

⁸ *Mishnas Moshe* (to *Chagigah* 13b) notes that the cherub only appeared on the Throne in the future, after the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf. Beforehand, an ox appeared on the throne. Nonetheless, Yaakov’s vision saw into the future.

that belonged to her father”, as if to say that *only* her father Lavan had this type of livestock—and nobody else. Before explaining in what way these animals were special, Rabbi Kluger explains that Lavan merited to have such animals in his flock only on account of the fact that Rachel was their shepherd. Had somebody else shepherded Lavan’s animals, then he would not have been given these special sheep. Only because Rachel was his shepherd did he merit these special sheep. This too is implicit in the verse we are discussing which reads: “for the shepherd *was she*”, as if to imply that should anybody else had been the shepherd, then these animals would not have been part of Lavan’s flock. If the Torah was simply telling us that Rachel was a shepherd, it should have said, “for she was a shepherd”. By reversing the subject and predicate in this verse, the Torah means to exclude any other shepherd, who would not have merited these special sheep.⁹ In what way were these sheep so special? R. Shlomo Kluger explains that the sheep over which Rachel presided had in them “holy souls” of the future Jewish People¹⁰—a phenomenon not found in anyone else’s

⁹ See what R. Shlomo Kluger (*Chochmas HaTorah* there pg. 307) writes about Rachel willingly accepting this role for herself. Even though Lavan could have found other shepherds, Rachel specifically took on the responsibility foreshadowing her future role of protecting the Jewish People are praying from mercy on their behalf (see *Bereishis Rabbah* 82:10). He also suggests in an alternate explanation that Lavan was really destined to be very poor, and not even possess a minimal amount of sheep. But, because Rachel was his shepherd, he merited to have some small amount of sheep because she was a righteous person. When Yaakov came and worked as Lavan’s shepherd, then Hashem gave Lavan even more sheep in Yaakov’s merit.

¹⁰ The Spinker Rebbe (*Chakal Yitzchak*, pg. 67b) cites the Arizal (*Shaar HaPesukim*, *Shemos* and *Shaar HaKavanos*, *Chag HaMatzos*) who wrote that that Talmud tell us that the Serpent in Gan Eden put spiritual filth into Adam and Eve when they accepting his advice and ate from the Tree of Knowledge, and all the future souls inherited this spiritual filth since they were present in Adam’s soul at that time. These souls were reincarnated into the Generation of the Deluge in an attempt to rectify this sin, but they lost that opportunity by continuing to act in a corrupt way. They were again reincarnated in to the Generation of Dispersal (at the Tower of Babel) and in the people of Sodom, but both times did not live up to their expectations and were destroyed. After being reincarnated as people three times and each time not being able to fix themselves, these souls lost their chance to be reincarnated as people and could only return to this world as inanimate objects. The Spinker Rebbe then explains in the name of his father (the author of *Imrei Yosef*) that the positive work of Avraham Avinu was able to lift up these souls from being in a state of inanimate objects (*domem*) to being vegetation (*tzomeach*, literally “growing”). Yitzchok Avinu was able to bring them up one more level from flora to becoming living insects. And finally, through Yaakov Avinu, these souls were able to become living animals—in the form of Lavan’s sheep. Rabbi Yisroel of Kozhnitz once remarked that he remembered when his soul was reincarnated in Lavan’s sheep, and he recalled the feeling of Yaakov striking him with

herd. Hashem gave Lavan these sheep with “holy souls” because his daughter Rachel was in charge of those sheep, and only she could manage such sheep. With this idea, Rabbi Kluger goes on to explain several perplexing points in the story of Yaakov and Lavan. Firstly, why did Yaakov feel justified in swindling Lavan by using spotted sticks to purposely breed spotted sheep for his own taking? In light of what we have just explained, Rabbi Kluger answers that really these “special sheep” in Lavan’s flock were not given to Lavan; rather Hashem granted them to Lavan because of Rachel. If Rachel was the real “owner” of these sheep, then when Yaakov married Rachel, he was justified in doing whatever he had to in order to possess those animals. Indeed, Yaakov’s wives later declared, “...for all the riches which God had separated from our father, [really] it is ours and our children’s” (Gen. 31:16). In this declaration, Rachel and Leah acknowledge that whatever special items Hashem granted Lavan only came in their own merit, not in Lavan’s merit. Moreover, when Yaakov saw that his uncle’s sheep had sparks of holiness with them, he realized that he must take possession of them. He reasoned that if left in Lavan’s care, those “holy souls” would be doomed to descend to the fifty gates of impurity—from which it would be impossible to recover. This is already evident in the beginning of the story, for when Yaakov first encountered Rachel and her flock, he immediately removed the heavy boulder from atop the well, so that he could draw water and give Lavan’s sheep to drink (Gen. 29:10). In doing so, Yaakov restored “life” to these “holy souls” such that they could return to their holy roots and not be polluted by the influence of Lavan. For this reason, Yaakov undertook upon himself to say in Lavan’s house for seven years, such that he immediately afterwards could marry Rachel and father Yosef (whom he thought would be born first), and straightaway leave Lavan’s household (so that Lavan would not be able to negatively influence his family). Yaakov figured that it would take him seven years to separate the holiness of the sheep in Rachel’s charge from their “husks” (*kelipos*) of impurity, so he accepted upon himself to linger on with Lavan for seven years before marrying Rachel. However, Lavan had other plans. He wanted Yaakov to stay longer and father more children while still living under his own sphere of influence so that Yaakov’s children will mix in with Lavan’s evil environment and learn from his ways. He also wanted to hold onto the souls of the future Jewish People which were within his sheep. For this reason, instead of allowing Yaakov to marry Rachel immediately after the initial seven-year period, he gave Leah to Yaakov instead. By doing this, Lavan sought to ensure that Yaakov would stay for *another* seven years—giving Lavan

a strap. A similar idea is cited in the name of Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum of Ujhley (author of *Yismach Moshe*), who also claims to remember being a sheep in Yaakov’s care.

*Much of the material presented in **Oneg!** has been translated from Rabbi Elchanan Shoff’s weekly **Aalefcha Chochma** parsha sheet in Hebrew by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein. To sign up to the **Oneg!** weekly email list, or to sponsor a week of **Oneg!** send an email to BKLAshul@gmail.com*

more time to negatively influence Yaakov and his family. Moreover, by surreptitiously switching out Rachel for Leah, Lavan achieved another objective: he foiled all the work that Yaakov had done for the previous seven years. The Talmud (*Nedarim* 20b) says that if one engages in intimacy with one of his wives while thinking about a different one of his wives, then the resulting children are stained with the status of *bnei temurah* (“children of switching”).¹¹ Although the commentaries explain why, for largely technical reasons, Yaakov eldest son Reuven is not considered a *ben temurah* (see *Zohar* 153b and *Ohr HaChaim* to Gen. 49:3), the fact that Yaakov ultimately engaged in intimacy with Leah while thinking she was Rachel is still considered a stain on his otherwise sterling reputation. This slight stain on the holy *tzadik’s* record had the power to overturn all the positive advances Yaakov made during his seven years of rectifying the souls of Lavan’s sheep. Now, Yaakov had to start all over again—so he agreed to work for Lavan for another seven years. This time, Yaakov came up with a way of discerning the sheep with the Jewish Souls from the other sheep. As Rabbi Kluger explains, something which is wholly black or wholly white is something whose outward appearances wholly reflects its essence. It is a case of something clear-cut, open and shut, black and white without any nuances. However, something which is spotted, has a background and foreground—two different types of colors functioning at the same time. Such a thing is more nuanced and complicated. It may have different facets or aspects to it. It is not as clear-cut. For this reason, Yaakov agreed that any sheep which was completely white without any spots would belong to Lavan, while the spotted sheep he would take for himself (Gen. 30:31–34). This is because Yaakov understood that the spotted sheep were the ones that within which the Holy Souls of the future Jewish People were latent. The fact these sheep had background and a foreground on their skin showed Yaakov that they were not on the inside what they appeared to be on the outside. In other words, he realized that while on the outside these sheep looked like sheep, on the inside, they were actually housing the souls of the Jewish People. By doing what he could to generate more spotted sheep, Yaakov sought to bring out all the souls of the Jewish People as fast as he could before they would become irreversibly influenced by Lavan. For this reason, when praying for our salvation on Hoshanah Rabbah, we ask Hashem, “Answer the trustworthy ones... for the sake of he who split sticks [i.e. Yaakov when he was trying to generate more spotted sheep].” On Hoshanah Rabbah, we mean to say that even though we have unfortunately committed various sins, we still have an essence of holiness within ourselves. We invoke the memory of Yaakov Avinu because he knew exactly what needed to be done in order to preserve the

¹¹ See *Magen Avraham* (to *Orach Chaim* 240) and other sources.

holy souls embedded in Lavan's sheep and to bring them up such that they will not become polluted and be forever lost. Rabbi Kluger continue to explain that perhaps for this reason the Torah reports, "Yaakov took for himself a wet sticks of *livanah* [white tree], *luz*, and chestnut..." (Gen. 30:37). What is *luz*? Firstly, it is well-known that Luz is the name of a city where people did not die (see *Sotah* 46b). Secondly, in the Torah the place-name Luz alludes to the place of the future Holy Temple (see Gen. 28:19). Thirdly, the *luz*-bone is a part of the spine which never decomposes and is destined to serve as the nucleus from which people will be resurrected in the future (See *Bereishis Rabbah* 28; *Tosafos* to *Bava Kama* 16b; *Beis Yosef, Orach Chaim* 300; *Bris Shalom, Parshas Vayetze* pg. 123; and many other sources). The common theme that unites all three uses of the word *luz* is that *luz* represents something holy which last forever and cannot be polluted through sin, whether it refers to a city where people live forever, the site of the Temple whose holiness remains forever, or the *luz*-bone which also remains forever. Because Yaakov Aveinu used the *luz* in generating spotted sheep, he entrenched this notion within the Jewish People that even should they sin—*chas vshalom* forefend—they will always retain some sparks of holiness which can never be tainted.

And the eyes of Leah were soft, and Rachel was beautiful in form and beautiful in appearance (Gen. 29:17). Ibn Ezra cites a Karaite sage named Ben-Efraim (בן אפרים) who said that the word "soft" (רכות) in this context is missing the letter *aleph* and should really be read "long" (ארכות). However, Ibn Ezra disagrees and says about Ben-Efraim that he himself is missing an *aleph*. Rabbi Chaim Vital (*Eitz HaDaas Tov* vol. 2, 350) explains that Ibn Ezra meant to attack Ben-Efraim in an *ad hominem* way by insulting him and saying that the letter *aleph* in Ben-Efraim's name is extra, and he ought to be called Ben-Parim ("son of cows", בן פרים).

And it was in the morning—and behold!—she is Leah (Gen. 29:25). Rashi explains that only in the morning did Yaakov realize that the woman whom he married the night before was Leah, but during the night he did not realize that it was Leah because Rachel passed on to her the codes that Rachel and Yaakov had made up beforehand. This idea is also found in the Gemara (*Megillah* 13b). What were these codes? R. Chaim Yosef Dovid Azulai, the Chida, writes in *Midbar Kedemos* (*Maareches Zayin*, 12) in the name of his great-grandfather, the *Chesed Le'Avraham*¹² that if a man who has merited a fitting wife, she will initiate touch the big toe of his right foot, and the thumb of his right hand, and the earlobe of his right ear.

¹² See *Chesed Le'Avraham* (Ein HaKoreh, Nahar 61) who elaborates on this.

These, he teaches, are the codes/signs that Yaakov Avinu made up with Rachel. The *Daas Zekainim* (to Gen. 29:25) writes that the codes were the three *mitzvos* of *Niddah*, *Challah*, and *Hadlakos HaNeiros*. Rabbi Chaim Palagi in *U-Vacharta Ba-Chaim* (*Parshas Vayeitzei*) writes in the name of *Ohalei Yehuda* in the name of the Arizal, that Yaakov taught Rachel how to read *Kriyas Shema* as the code. The Maharal's brother, R. Chaim writes in *Sefer HaChaim* (1:2) that the Torah can only be preserved through the incredible Aggados (the legends and deep teachings of our sages), and this is the meaning of the codes that Yaakov passed on to Rachel, he taught the the fantastic secrets of the Aggados!

And Hashem saw that Leah was hated, and He opened her womb, and Rachel was barren (Gen. 29:31). Targum Yonason renders this verse in Aramaic as, "It was revealed in front of Hashem that Leah was not loved by Yaakov..." He clearly understands that Yaakov did not love Leah. However, Ramban writes that some say (see Radak) that Yaakov *did love* Leah, just not as much as he loved Rachel. Rabbenu Bechaya says the same thing. See *Shiurei Chumash* by R. Shlomo Wolbe (p. 253) who writes that Yaakov loved Rachel because he thought that the destiny of the Jewish People will come solely through Rachel. This very fact is what pained Leah and made her feel unloved. Interestingly, Rabenu Bechaya points out in a second answer that the Torah never says that "Yaakov hated Rachel" but rather that "she was hated" and he suggests that it was by Rachel, and that her uncomfortable position being rival-wife with her sister caused tension between them and Rachel's (natural, and perhaps unavoidable) jealousy made Leah feel hated.

And she became pregnant again, and she gave birth to a son. And she said, '...for Hashem has heard that I am hated, and He gave me this [son] also' and she called his name Shimon (Gen. 29:33). The *Peirush HaRokeach* explains that "for Hashem has heard" (כי שמע ה' = 466) equals in *gematria* the name Shimon (שמעון = 466).

And she called his name Yissachar (Gen. 30:18). The name Yissachar is spelled with two *sins* (יששכר). The Tosafists in *Daas Zekainim* explain that there are two *sins* in allusion to two different "rewards" (שכר) related to Yissachar. One "reward" is for good, that Leah asserts that she has received the reward due to her. The other "reward" is considered distasteful because it refers to the fact that Leah bought the right to be with Yaakov for the night from her sister Rachel as "reward" for her son Reuven giving Rachel the *dudaim*. This second reward is not something worth speaking about, so of the two *sins* in the name *Yissachar*, the

second *sin* is silent—that's why his name is pronounced Yissachar, not Yissaschar.¹³ Nonetheless, the *Chasam Sofer* (in *Toras Moshe* here) rules that the first time his name is read in the Torah (i.e., here when reading Parshas Vayeitzei), it should be pronounced Yissaschar as it is written.

And it was told to Lavan on the third day that Yaakov fled, and he chased after him a distance of seven days (Gen. 31:22). The Vilna Gaon (*Biur HaGra* to *Tikkunei Zohar* 80:3) explains that Yaakov's experience with Lavan foreshadowed the Jews' experience with the Egyptians, as we say *מעשה אבות סימן לבנים* ("the actions of the fathers are omens for the children"). Just as Yaakov was exiled from the Holy Land to live with his uncle/father-in-law Lavan, and ended up leaving with much of Lavan's belongings, so were the Jewish people exiled to Egypt and ended up leaving with much of the Egyptian's belongings. Just as Lavan was smitten with a stick, so did Hashem perform miracles for the Jews in Egypt via Moshe's stick. Just as Yaakov escaped Lavan's house and travelled for three days before Lavan began to chase him, so did the Jews escape and travelled for three days before the Egyptians started to chase them. For this reason, the Vilna Gaon explains, we begin our account of the Exodus story at the Passover Seder by saying *Arami Oved Av* ("An Aramaean [i.e. Lavan] tried to destroy our forefather [Yaakov]").

My righteousness will answer for me on the morrow... (Gen. 30:33). The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* §73:9) applies to Yaakov Avinu's boast a different verse: "Do not take pride in tomorrow' (Prov. 27:1), for tomorrow, your daughter will go out and be raped." What is the connection between Dinah's rape (Gen. 34:1) and Yaakov Avinu proving to Lavan his trustworthiness? The *Chasam Sofer* (in *Toras Moshe* here) explains this in accordance with what Rashi (to Gen. 32:23) wrote. Rashi explains that the rape of Dinah was a punishment to Yaakov Avinu for hiding Dinah in a box so that Esav could not look at her. If instead Yaakov would have allowed Esav to marry Dinah, she could have possibly turned him around and brought him back to the proper path. However, Yaakov decided that the danger of Esav corrupting Dinah and bringing her to sin was too great for him to risk allowing Esav to see her. Based on this, explains the *Chasam Sofer*, we see that Yaakov was not really so

¹³ *Daas Zeknaim* also explain that the second *sin* is not read because we understand that Yisachar gave that letter of his name to his son. In Gen. 46:13, Yissachar has a son named Yov (יוב), while in Num. 26:24, that son's name is given as Yashuv (ישוב)—with an extra *shin*. According to the *Daas Zekanim*, Yisachar decided that the name that he originally gave his son is considered inappropriate (because Yov/Jove is another name for the Roman god Jupiter), so he took the letter *sin* from his own name, and gave it to his son.

confident in his families righteousness for the future, because if he really was truly confident that his descendants will continue his path of righteousness into the future, then there was no reason to keep Dinah away from Esav. For this reason, the Midrash criticizes Yaakov Avinu for saying “My righteousness will answer for me on the morrow...” by explaining that this very verse accentuates the criticism against Yaakov for hiding Dinah, and if he was truly confident in his family’s future, then there would be no justification in hiding Dinah from Esav.

And it was at the time that the sheep were “in heat”, I lifted my eyes and I say in a dream—and behold!... (Gen. 31:10–12). We pray in the Hoshanah services on Hoshanah Rabbah: “Answer the devoted... for the sake of he who split the bark of sticks [i.e. Yaakov, when he was trying to custom breed Lavan’s sheep to maximize his profits].” The Ostrovtzer Gaon asks (*Beis Meir*, vol. 2, *Sukkos* 4) how can we invoke the merit of Yaakov Avinu who employed this scam against Lavan as if it is a merit for us? Does it not look like trickery and deceit? In order to explain this, he notes that when Yaakov originally pledged his allegiance to God at the beginning of the Parashah, he said, “...and Hashem will be for me a God” (Gen. 28:21). The word God (א-להים = 86) in *gematria* equals the word “the nature” (הטבע = 86).¹⁴ In Yaakov Avinu’s pledge, he requested that Hashem (i.e. the Tetragrammaton which represents His trait of mercy) should be his God, meaning that all influx of good in This World should come to him through “nature”. This is because he reasoned that when Hashem performs miracles on somebody’s behalf, this subtracts from

¹⁴ Chida (*Dvash le-Fi, Maareches Tes*, §1) cites unnamed *rishonim* who quote this *gematria*. Other sources attribute this *gematria* to the Baal HaTurim in *Parshas Bereishis*, but it is not found there. Still others locate the source of this explanation as R. Yosef Karo’s *Maggid Meisharim* in *Parshas Mishpatim*, but it is not found there either. However, R. Shmuel Ashkenazi (a Yerushalmi Jew who is a retired librarian at the National Library of Israel) wrote about this extensively in his work *Alpha Besa de-Shmuel Zeira* (pgs. 104–105). He writes that the earliest source in which this *gematria* is found is in the work *Parshas Bereishis* by the Kabbalist Rabbi Yosef ben Shalom Ashkenazi (who lived in the late 1200’s–early 1300’s). From there, it was quoted by R. Dovid ben Zimra, also known as *advaz*, in his work *Metzudas Dovid* in the name of an anonymous Kabbalist. R. Shmuel Ashkenazi also notes that another commentator who lived then also cites this idea: R. Yosef ibn Kapsi (in his super-commentary *Peirush Ha-Sodos* to Ibn Ezra’s commentary to *Parshas V’eschanan*). Nonetheless, the linkage between the name *elokim* and nature (without the *gematria* component) is found several times in the even earlier work *Ginas Egoz* by the early Kabbalist R. Yosef Gikitalia who wrote that the name *elokim* recalls God’s role in the formation of nature without mentioning that *elokim* = *ha-teva* in *gematria* (see Hanover ed., p. 5b, 12b, 13b, and 21a). R. Yosef Gikitalia’s source, in turn, is the writings of his teacher R. Avraham Abulafia (in *Chayei HaNefesh* pg. 65 and *Sefer HaCheshek* 2:2).

their accrued merits (*Shabbos* 32a). Therefore, Yaakov asked that everything that comes to him should arrive through the forces of nature, and not through miracles. To this effect, Yaakov sought to insure his profits by natural selection, instead of relying on a miracle. In truth, even if Yaakov Avinu would not have put in any effort in insuring the births of certain types of sheep, it would have happened anyways—but through a miracle process, instead of a natural one. With this in mind, we can now understand the Hoshanah Rabbah prayer mentioned above. When we invoke the memory of Yaakov’s “trick”, we seek to invoke Yaakov Avinu’s excess merits which remained in his account because he did not rely on the miracle. Those merits continue to remain in place, and when we pray on Hoshanah Rabbah we hope to use those merits to our advantage.

Guard yourself from speaking with Yaakov from good to bad (Gen. 31:29). The Gemara (*Yevamos* 103b) asks that it makes sense why Hashem warned Lavan not to say anything bad to Yaakov, but why did He warn Lavan to even not say anything good? The work *Taam Man* (cited in *Yalkut HaUrim* here) explains that Chazal tells us (*Bereshis Rabbah* 13) the reason that Rivkah did not bear children right when she first married Yitzchak. It was so that people would not think that the blessing that her brother Lavan and her mother gave her before her marriage (Gen. 24:60) bore fruit. Instead, Hashem made Rivkah childless for twenty years, and only afterwards allowed her to have children. For the same reason, Hashem warned Lavan not to say anything good to Yaakov, because if it would do so, then Hashem would block that good from coming to fruition so that it would not be attributed to Lavan’s blessing.

I have the power in my hands to do with you evil, and the God your father said to me last night, ‘guard yourself from speaking to Yaakov from good to bad’ (Gen. 31:29). The Netziv, R. Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (*Haamek Davar*, Cooperman edition)¹⁵ points out something fascinating about this verse. When Lavan threatens Yaakov’s family and says “...to do with you evil...” the word “you” is written in plural form (עִמָּכֶם) instead in singular (עִמְךָ). Similarly, when Lavan says “...and the God your father...” the word “your” is written in plural (אֱלֹהֵיכֶם) instead of singular form (אֱלֹהֵיךָ). The Netziv explains that such is the manner of people. When they see one Jew steal, they saw about all Jews that they are thieves and claim that it is Judaism itself which allows them to act poorly. Because of this, they want to harm and destroy Judaism as a whole. This sort of behavior began with Lavan

¹⁵ The Cooperman Edition of HaEmek Davar, published by a son of Rabbi Yehuda Cooperman, inserts into the work unpublished passages from a manuscript of the Netziv.

who wanted to destroy the Jewish People, as we say מעשה אבות סימן לבנים (“the actions of the fathers are omens for the children”). For this reason, Lavan refers to “you” and “your” in the plural. He was not just threatening Yaakov with retaliation, but was threatening the entire Jewish People collectively.

I have the power in my hands to do to you evil, and the God your father said to me last night, ‘guard yourself from speaking to Yaakov from good to bad’ (Gen. 31:29).

R. Yoel Teitelbaum, the Satmar Rebbe, asks in his work *Divrei Yoel (Parshas Vayeitzei*, pg. 101) that Lavan seems to contradict himself in the self-same verse! In the beginning he says “I have the power in my hands to do you evil”, yet in the second half, he says that Hashem warned him not even to *say* anything bad to Yaakov, let alone do anything malicious. The Satmar Rebbe answers that such is the way of the wicked to brazenly claim that even a commandment which they openly admit was given no longer applies. In this case, Lavan admits that Hashem warned him not to say anything bad to Yaakov, yet in the same sentence flouts that commandments and threatens Yaakov harm. The wicked will always abrogate their responsibilities by saying “the times have changed” so even though this commandment applied in the past, it no longer applied now. Lavan admitted that *last night* Hashem warned him not to say anything bad to Yaakov, but *now* is a different story! Similarly, the *Chasam Sofer* writes in his ethical will, “Do not say ‘the times have changed.’ We have an Ancient Father, and He has not changed nor will He ever change!”

Whomever your god shall be found with shall not live (Gen. 31:32). Rashi explains that Rachel died on the road because of this curse (his source is *Bereishis Rabbah* 74:9). *Shaarei Abaron* cites the Zohar as explaining that Rachel stole her father’s *terafim* in order to take away from him his idolatry. Yet, despite her good intentions, on account of the fact that she nonetheless caused her father pain, she was punished in that she did not get to raise her son Binyamin for even one moment. R. Menachem Kasher in *Torah Sheleimah* cites the *Sefer Chassidim* (Mikizei Nirdamim ed., 924) who explains that Rachel was punished because Yaakov was right there and she should have asked him if she should take her father’s *terafim* or not. Because Yaakov was a wise and pious person, she was expected to ask his opinion before taking such actions. Since she did not consult with him, she was duly punished.

If not that the God of my father—the God of Avraham and [the] fear [of] Yitzchak—was with me, now I would have been sent empty. God saw my poverty and my toiling of hand, as last night has proven (Gen. 31:42). R. Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg in *HaKesav VeHaKabbalah* explains, based on the Targum Onkelos, that “the fear of Yitzchak” refers to “He whom Yitzchak fears [i.e. Hashem]”. The Radak explains that this refers to Yitzchak

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allowing himself to be offered as sacrifice at the *Akeidah*, which shows his true awe of God. The *Zohar* (vol. 1, 87b) writes: Yitzchak taught everybody that there is justice and there is a Judge above who will pay back the wicked. Because Yitzchak taught the lesson that Hashem punishes the wicked and showed therefore should be feared, He is described by the Torah as “He whom Yitzchak feared”. The concept that Yitzchak is associated with Hashem’s attribute of *gevurah* (“power”/”restraint”) is found in the *Zohar* (vol. 2, 276b), as well as in the teachings of Arizal (*Eitz Chaim* Shaar 22, ch. 3, pg. 105b) and in Maharal’s *Derech Chaim* (*Avos* 1:5).