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Vaporizing the Untenable to Assure the Perpetuity of Existence

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1. Yaakov leaves Beersheva to go to Charan.
2. Chazal: When a devoutly righteous person leaves a location, its splendor & beauty depart with him.
3. This is extrapolated from the words "Yaakov left Beersheva".
4. Although Yitzchok & Rifka remained his absence made its mark.
5. He fathered the twelve tribes; his absence was more greatly felt.
6. Was it that the 12 tribes were only a consequence of Yaakov's dimension?
7. Yaakov: "Man of The Tent (of Torah)"; was a personification of the Torah.
8. Midrash: Avraham was thrown into the fiery kiln: the heavenly angels objected to G-d's saving him.
9. "A man whose descendants are going to be evil how do you save him?"
10. G-d: He will have a grandson Yaakov in whose merit he will be saved.
11. Prophets: The house of Yaakov redeemed Avraham.
12. Gemara: "I've created an evil inclination; I've created Torah as its antidote."
13. Midrash: As long as the voice is the voice of Yaakov, the hands can not be the hands of Esav.
14. The counterbalance to Esav is Yaakov.
15. Yaakov will counter all of Avraham's evil descendants (Yishmael, Edom)
16. His absence was felt there because only he could counter the evil of Esav.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Vayeitzei

**NO ROOM
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Esav's Misconception of Yaakov

Toldos: Yaakov, due to his mother's directive, took the blessings that were rightfully his from Yitzchak, his father, rather than allowing Esav to receive them. Rivka's directive was based upon her prophecy. When Esav realized that Yaakov had taken his blessing, he vowed to kill him after his father passes away. Yaakov was thus instructed by his mother to flee to her brother Lavan so that he should not be killed by Esav. Yitzchak not being aware of Esav's intent, instructed Yaakov to go to Lavan to marry one of his daughters.

Midrash: Initially Yaakov had been sent off with great wealth in order to attain a wife. However, on his way he was confronted by Elifaz, the son of Esav. He was sent by his father to kill Yaakov. Yaakov had convinced Elifaz to take all his wealth rather than kill him. By doing so, it would be considered as if he were dead. As it is stated, "One who is impoverished is the equivalent of one

who is dead." Elifaz was thus able to fulfill his father's dictate without actually taking Yaakov's life.

Because Yaakov had relinquished the wealth that his parents had given him to negotiate for the hand of one of Lavan's daughters, he was forced to remain in the house of Lavan for many years. Although Esav knew that Yaakov was alive and well in Charan, he did not pursue him to avenge his taking of the blessings. If he had initially vowed to kill Yaakov, because of his deceit and theft of the blessings, why did Esav not pursue Yaakov and kill him in the house of Lavan? In addition, understanding the nature of Lavan, who was evil, he would not have interfered with Esav's initiative. Esav allowed Yaakov to remain with Lavan his uncle for many years unharmed. Why was this so?

If Yaakov would not have been confronted with Elifaz he would have retained his wealth. He would have had the means and ability to negotiate with Lavan for the hand of his daughter and return home after a short period

of time as his mother had instructed him. As the verse states, "And remain with him (*Lavan*) for a short while..." However, because he did not have the material means, he was forced to violate the dictate of his mother. He was punished measure for measure for disobeying.

Chazal: Because *Yaakov* had denied his parents his presence for twenty two years, he was punished by G-d, causing him to grieve for *Yosef* for twenty-two years believing he was dead.

Torah: After *Esav* had discovered that *Yaakov* had taken the blessings, "Esav said to his father, 'Have you but one blessing, Father? Bless me too...' *Yitzchak* answered, '... By the sword you shall live, but your brother you shall serve; yet it shall be that when you are aggrieved, you may cast off his yoke from upon your neck.'"

Rashi citing *Chazal*: "When you are aggrieved" means "When Israel will neglect the *Torah*, and you will be pained over the blessing that you did not receive, you will be able to cast his yoke from upon your neck." Meaning, *Esav* is only subordinated to *Yaakov* as long as he maintains his level of spirituality through the observance of the *Torah* and its *mitzvos*. If he should become spiritually diminished, the blessing that was given to *Yaakov* would be nullified and *Esav* would gain the upper hand and dominate *Yaakov*.

Esav was aware that *Yaakov* had arrived at the house of *Lavan* in an impoverished state. Consequently, he would be forced to remain in an environment that was devoid of spirituality and exposed to a person who personified evil and depravity for an extended period of time. *Esav* believed that with time, *Yaakov's* dimension of spirituality would erode and be diminished, thus rendering the blessing of *Yitzchak* to *Yaakov* null and void. Therefore, there was no need for him to pursue *Yaakov* to kill him because it was inevitable that *Esav* in time would regain his birthright.

When *Yaakov* was returning from *Lavan* after being away for more than twenty years, he communicated to his brother *Esav* saying, "I have sojourned with *Lavan* (*im Lavan gartie*) and lingered until now."

Rashi: The word "*gartie*" is numerically the equivalent of "*taryag*," which corresponds to the 613 *mitzvos* of the *Torah*. *Yaakov* was in essence saying to *Esav* that although he had been exposed to *Lavan* for a period of twenty years, he was returning spiritually unscathed. He was not diminished to any degree. Upon hearing

what *Yaakov* had said, *Esav* realized that the blessing of his father remained secure with *Yaakov*. He thus came against *Yaakov* with an army of 400 men to kill him. *Yaakov*, because of his dimension spirituality that was due to his being the personification of *Torah*, was able to create an insular environment to protect himself and his family from the impurity and influences of the community.

When *Yaakov* had gone to Egypt, which was a bastion of impurity, he was able to create a similar environment that left his family spiritually pure and unaffected, despite the spiritual contamination of Egypt.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: The effect of the bondage upon the Jewish people only began after *Yaakov* had passed away because his presence was no longer there to offer spiritual protection. It is only through the study of *Torah* and the observance of its *mitzvos* that one can be protected and insulated from the negative influences of the world to which mankind is vulnerable.

Gemara in Tractate *Kiddushin*: "I (G-d) created the evil inclination and I created the *Torah* as its antidote."

Yaakov's Sensitivity to Evil

Torah: After *Yaakov* had awoken from his prophetic dream in which G-d had said to him "I will watch over you wherever you go..." *Yaakov* said, "If G-d will be with me, will guard me on this way that I am going..."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: "When *Yaakov* had said, 'will guard me...' it is referring to the promise that G-d had made to *Yaakov* saying, 'I will guard you wherever you go.'" When *Yaakov* received the blessings from his father, he was sixty-three years old. The *Torah* quantifies him as "the perfect man who dwelt in the tent (of *Torah*)."

Gemara in Tractate *Megillah*: When *Yaakov* had fled from his home, he spent fourteen years in the *Yeshiva* of *Shem v'Aiver* before going to the home of his uncle *Lavan*. If *Yaakov* is quantified as one who personifies and embodies the *Torah* prior to leaving his home, what was the value of the addition fourteen years of *Torah* study at the *Yeshiva* of *Shem v'Aiver*?

Initially, *Yaakov* did not believe that he would ever need to leave the confines of the holy Land of Israel and the spiritual environment that was created by his parents. However, when he needed to flee from his brother *Esav*

to *Charan* where his uncle *Lavan* lived, he understood that he would be leaving a holy environment to go to an evil community that was steeped in sin. In order to guarantee that his spirituality would not be diminished from being exposed to spiritual impurity of *Charan*, *Yaakov* understood that he needed to immerse himself in *Torah* study that was specifically for dealing with issues outside of the Land. The *Yeshiva* of *Shem v'Aiver* studied the tradition that was passed down from *Noach*, who survived the extreme depravity and evil of his generation.

Midrash: When *Yaakov* requested that G-d safeguard him, he meant that G-d should protect him from the evil influences of adultery, murder, idolatry, and evil speech (*lashon hara*). How could the concern of being exposed to the evils of the three Cardinal Sins (adultery, murder, and idolatry) be equated with the sin of *lashon hara*?

Torah: One is obligated to give his life rather than violate any of the three Cardinal Sins. This is not so regarding evil speech. Nevertheless, *Yaakov* was equally concerned about being exposed to *lashon hara* as was regarding the three Cardinal Sins.

Chofetz Chaim: Over time if one engages in evil speech one can be in violation of fourteen positive commandments and seventeen negative commandments. One of the positive commandments that one transgresses with *lashon hara* is "You shall love your fellow as you love yourself." When one speaks negatively about another without concern for the consequences, he can only do so if he does not value the other individual's existence.

The devaluation of another is rooted in one's arrogance. If one comes to the point of devaluating an individual through *lashon hara* it can ultimately come lead to something more serious. Because if one does have any regard for the other person's existence – as is indicated by his negative verbal expression – he may not value him to the point of even considering taking his life or committing adultery with his wife. Similarly, the negative characteristic of arrogance may ultimately cause one to choose to become a pagan because paganism is self-serving.

Lashon hara is the first step in the direction, which can ultimately cause one to violate the three Cardinal Sins. Because *Yaakov* was the most special of the Patriarchs and personified *Torah*, he understood the regression

that evil brings about. He thus supplicated that G-d should protect him from adultery, murder, idolatry, and *lashon hara*.

The Need to Pray

Before *Yaakov* fled to *Charan*, the community of his uncle *Lavan* he supplicated G-d.

Torah: "Yaakov took a vow saying, 'If G-d will be with me, will guard me on this way that I am going, will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear; and I return in peace to my father's house...'"

Midrash: "Reb Brechya says, 'Everything that *Yaakov* had requested from G-d was granted. *Yaakov* had asked that G-d be with him. The verse states, 'I (G-d) will accompany you...' *Yaakov* had asked to be protected. The verse states, 'I shall watch over you wherever you go.' *Yaakov* asked that he should return to his home in peace. The verse states, 'I will bring you back...' *Yaakov* had asked G-d to guarantee him bread (sustenance), G-d did not respond. G-d said, 'If I guarantee *Yaakov* his bread, he would not have any reason to supplicate Me. Therefore I will not guarantee him his bread.'

"The *Rabbis* argue with *Reb Brechya*: G-d in fact did respond to *Yaakov* – guaranteeing him his sustenance/ bread – as it states, 'I will not abandon you...' The expression of abandonment refers to sustenance. As King David writes in Psalms, 'I have never seen a devoutly righteous person abandoned by G-d so that his children should seek out bread.'"

Is it conceivable that if *Yaakov* were guaranteed a livelihood he would no longer supplicate G-d? Evidently, according to *Reb Brechya* interpretation of the verse, it is a valid concern. The *Rabbis* on the other hand disagree and are of the opinion that *Yaakov* would still have sufficient reason to supplicate G-d.

Reb Brechya: G-d granted every request that *Yaakov* had made except for his request for sustenance because if He were to grant *Yaakov* everything he would not have any reason to supplicate G-d.

Midrash: The reason the Holy Matriarchs were barren was because "G-d desires the prayers of the righteous." It is through the special supplications of the *tzaddik* when he is in a state of deprivation that he is able to reach greater dimensions heights of spirituality and thus become closer to G-d.

The *Rabbis* disagree with *Reb Brechya*. They understand that G-d granted *Yaakov* everything he requested. Why are the *Rabbis* not concerned that if *Yaakov* did in fact have everything he would have no reason to supplicate G-d?

Yaakov understood that the reason G-d granted him with all his needs was because at the time he was spiritually worthy. Thus, the guarantee that he received was contingent upon his maintaining an advanced level of spirituality. If he were to become soiled with sin, even to the slightest degree he would forfeit the blessings that were given to him by G-d. Therefore, despite the fact that *Yaakov* was granted all that he requested he nevertheless still needed to pray to G-d that he should not fail in his service to Him.

Torah: Regarding *Sarah's* request to *Avraham* to take *Hagar* as a wife, "*Sarah* said to *Avraham*, 'I will be able to build through her...' Meaning, in the merit of *Avraham* taking her maidservant as a wife, *Sarah* would be able to conceive. *Sarah* had given her maidservant to *Avraham* because she believed that she was not able to conceive because of a spiritual deficiency that she could not identify.

The reason one has difficulty from sensing one's own shortcomings is because one's ego does not allow it. However, if one is sufficiently humble, he will sense where he had failed. Therefore, *Sarah* understood that if she were to be humbled by the experience of sharing her husband with her maidservant, she would be able to identify and address the spiritual failing and make the necessary correction.

Torah: During the forty years that the Jewish people were in the desert, G-d provided them with no more than a daily portion of Manna. Although they were in an environment that one cannot survive without G-d's Assistance, the reason G-d did not offer them a larger allocation of Manna was not because He wanted them to pray, but rather it was for them to develop a sense of trust and faith in G-d that He would provide them with their needs. Thus, the receiving of the Manna is not related to the argument between *Reb Brechya* and the *Rabbis*.

Gemara in Tractate *Avodah Zorah*: There is a time period every day that G-d provides sustenance to all creatures, from the largest of His creations to the smallest insect.

King David in Psalms (the *Ashrei* prayer which is recited twice a day): "You open Your Hand and

satisfy the desire of every living thing." It through the supplication for sustenance that one maintains a relationship with G-d.

Torah: Regarding the curse that G-d had given the snake after it seduced *Chava* to eat from the Tree, "...Accursed are you...upon your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life." One would think that since the snake was able to eat dirt, which is available regardless of the snake's surroundings that G-d was not cursing the snake but rather it was a blessing. The snake would be continuously guaranteed sustenance. However, it is to the contrary. G-d did not want to have any relationship with the snake, even in thought. Therefore, He decreed that its sustenance should be available without his direct continuous intervention in its behalf.

Good and Evil on Equal Footing

Torah: *Yaakov* our Patriarch had a prophetic dream when he had slept on the Temple Mount. He had seen angels ascending and descending a ladder that extended into heaven. Each of the angels that ascended and descended the ladder represented the archangels of the various civilizations that were going to enslave the Jewish people in the future.

Midrash: "*Rav Shmuel Bar Nachman* says, 'These are the angels of the nations of the world. *Yaakov* was shown the archangel of Babylon. He ascended 70 rungs of the ladder and then he descended. (Indicating that the Babylonian exile was going to be 70 years). *Yaakov* was then shown the archangel of Persia, which ascended 52 rungs before descending. The archangel of the Greeks ascended 100 rungs and then descended.

"However, when *Yaakov* saw the archangel of the Edomites (*Esav/Rome*) it continued to ascend without any indication of descending. *Yaakov* upon seeing this was frightened. He said to G-d, 'Is it possible that this angel will ascend without ever descending? G-d responded, 'My servant *Yaakov*, do not fear. Even if you will see him (the archangel of *Edom*) ascending up to the point that is next to Me, from there I will bring him down.' As it is written, If they rise like an eagle and perch among the stars, from there I (G-d) will bring them down.'"

The *Midrash* is saying that the archangel of *Edom*, which is a personification of evil is able to ascend to

a point that he can associate himself with G-d. Why would G-d allow this to take place?

Gemara in Tractate *Yomah*: The evil inclination of idolatry was such an overwhelming force at one time that it ravaged and destroyed the Jewish people. One of the sins that had caused the destruction of the First Temple, was the sin of idolatry. It was even more overwhelming than the sexual drive.

The Men of the High Assembly, fasted for thirty days so that G-d should reveal to them the evil inclination for idolatry so that it could be destroyed. After thirty days they had witnessed a fiery lion exiting from the Holy of Holies. They took this fiery lion that was the representation of the inclination for idolatry and removed it from existence. It is interesting to note that the Holy of Holies, the location of G-d's Presence, should be the location from which the inclination for idolatry should exit. Seemingly, it is indicated that this intense impure force has relevance to the most holy.

In order to maintain the context of choice in the world, G-d needs have good and evil exist in on even plane so that each should be a counterbalance for the other. If the representation of good would be initially established at a level that would be superior and more advanced than evil, humanity would be compelled to do good, thus rendering choice irrelevant.

Therefore, in order to maintain the counterbalance, there needs to be a representation of good as well as evil at the same advanced spiritual level. Thus, the fiery lion that represented idolatry emanated from the Holy of Holies. *Yaakov*, being the representation of good and *Esav*, of evil, needed to immerge from their mother's womb simultaneously so that good and evil should exist on an equal footing.

We recite the verse in our prayers: "The saviors will ascend Mount Zion to judge *Esav's* mountain, and the kingdom will be *Hashem's*. The *Hashem* will be King over all the world, on that day G-d will be One and His Name will be One." Meaning, at the end of time, regardless of the degree of evil that will exist in the world, G-d will vanquish the representation of *Esav* from existence. This will thus endow mankind with a level of clarity to be able to recognize and fully appreciate G-d in every aspect of creation. However, before that will take place, G-d allows the archangel of *Edom* to ascend to His level, to be on par with the Jewish people.

Yaakov, Through the Millennia of Exile

Torah: When *Yaakov* our Patriarch saw *Rachel*, "Then *Yaakov*...raised his voice and wept."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The reason *Yaakov* wept was because he saw through his Divine Vision that *Rachel* would not be buried with him (in the Tomb of *Machpelah*). Another explanation cited by *Rashi* is that *Yaakov* wept because he came to *Rachel* empty-handed (without any gifts).

Midrash: "Yaakov had said, 'Eliezer the servant of my grandfather (*Avraham*) came with a nose ring, bracelets, and delicacies in his hand as gifts for *Rivka* and I did not.' It is because *Yaakov* was pursued by *Elifaz*, the son of *Esav*, who wished to kill him in order to fulfill the dictate of his father. Since *Elifaz* was raised by his grandfather *Yitzchak*, he withdrew his hand and did not kill *Yaakov*. *Elifaz* said to *Yaakov*, 'If I do not fulfill by father's dictate to kill you, how shall I fulfill my obligation to honor my father?' *Yaakov* said to him, 'Take all of my possessions. A poor person is the equivalent of one who is dead.'" Therefore, *Yaakov* had given all of his wealth to *Elifaz* in order to be spared. As a result of this encounter, he did not have anything to give to *Rachel*.

Why did *Yaakov* weep regarding the inability to give gifts to *Rachel*, our Matriarch? Regarding the nose ring and bracelets that were given by *Eliezer* to *Rivka*, our Matriarch, the *Torah* identifies the weight of each of the pieces of jewelry. The *Torah* identifies the weight of the nose ring as "*Bekka*."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The weight of the nose ring "*bekka*" is an allusion to the half-silver coin (*machtzis haShekel*) which would be given in the future by the Jewish people for the sake of purchasing communal offerings. (The communal offerings atoned for the Jewish people). The two bracelets are identified by the *Torah* as "two bracelets, their weight ten in gold." This alludes to the Ten Commandments that were inscribed on Two Tablets that were attached and of identical dimension. When *Eliezer* had given these gifts to *Rivka*, the future Matriarch of the Jewish people, he established and secured these two spiritual elements on behalf of the Jewish people.

Yaakov, our Patriarch, who fathered the twelve tribes understood that he must establish and secure a foundation that would guarantee the greatest potential for the spiritual advancement of the Jewish people.

Thus, when he came upon *Rachel*, who was destined to be his primary Matriarch, he understood because of the loss of his wealth that he was not able to establish the necessary elements for the future of the Jewish people. In addition, he could not reinforce what *Eliezer* had set into motion through the gifts of jewelry that were given to *Rivka*, our Matriarch. *Yaakov* wept because he had understood that the spiritual future of the Jewish people was compromised because he was not able to present *Rachel* with these necessary elements.

Elifaz, the son of *Esav*, confronted *Yaakov* after he had fled parents' home. After *Elifaz* had taken the wealth of *Yaakov*, he chose to spend fourteen years in the *Yeshiva* of *Shem v'Aiver*. Only after spending fourteen years studying Torah in this *Yeshiva*, did he continue on to the house of *Lavan*. If *Yaakov* had already spent sixty three years dedicated and immersed to Torah study, why did he need to study an additional fourteen years in the *Yeshiva* of *Shem v'Aiver*?

It was because he needed to study the *Torah* that was relevant to confronting all of the issues and influences of exile. Initially, *Yaakov* did not believe that he would need to spend any significant amount of time outside of the Land of Israel. *Yaakov* believed that he would only need to negotiate for the hand of *Rachel* and return home in a short while, as his mother had instructed him.

Gemara in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: When *Eliezer* went to seek out a wife for *Yitzchak*, he merited the miracle of "*kfitzas ha'derech* (shortening of distance). A journey that would have normally taken weeks, *Eliezer* traveled in less than a day.

Gemara in Tractate *Chullin*: *Yaakov* in fact merited a similar miracle. Just as *Avraham* understood that the hand of *Rivka* could not be negotiated unless *Yitzchak* possessed an enormous amount of wealth, so too did *Yitzchak* understand that *Yaakov* needed a great amount of wealth in order to negotiate with *Lavan* for the hand of one of his daughters. They understood with absolute clarity that without this degree of wealth, *Yaakov* would be forced to remain with *Lavan* for an

extended period of time. *Yaakov's* spirituality would thus be put into jeopardy.

However, because *Yaakov* had forfeited his wealth to *Elifaz*, in order to be spared, he understood that he would be forced to remain for an extended time outside of the confines of the Holy Land. For this reason, *Yaakov* chose to spend fourteen years in the *yeshiva* of *Shem v'Aiver* in order to fortify his spirituality to be able to contend with exile.

Yaakov is depicted as the Patriarch of exile. It is because he needed to be in exile for an extended period of time, he addressed all of the spiritual issues with which he would be confronted. *Yaakov* prepared himself and inculcated within his being all of the elements and safeguards that are necessary to survive exile.

Chazal: Exile is compared to the nighttime period. The experience of exile is a distortion of truth. Because of a lack of clarity, one has great difficulty to discern between right and wrong. This is similar to the nighttime period, during which one experiences difficulty in discerning which path to take due to the lack of illumination. Each of the Patriarchs enacted one of the three prayer services. *Yaakov* had enacted the *Maariv* service, which is a nighttime service. It is only because of what *Yaakov* had developed within himself that the Jewish people are able to maintain their spirituality despite the influences of exile.

Had *Elifaz* not taken *Yaakov's* wealth he would not have needed to study the additional fourteen years in the *yeshiva* of *Shem v'Aiver*. It would not have been necessary to address all the issues of exile because he would have returned immediately to the Holy Land. Consequently, the Jewish people, who were destined to go into exile, would not have been able to survive. G-d, therefore, orchestrated events so that *Yaakov* should be forced to develop this aspect of his spirituality. It came about through *Yaakov* relinquishing all of his worldly possessions to *Elifaz*, thus causing him to prepare for the inevitable exile that he would be forced to experience.

