

Yaaqob Avinu – Yaaqob Our Father

By Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben David (Greg Killian)



[The Two Missions 1](#_Toc24617247)

[Food and Tools 4](#_Toc24617248)

[The First Tool: The becorah, the birthright. 5](#_Toc24617249)

[The Second Tool: Esav’s Garment 6](#_Toc24617250)

[The Third Tool: The bracha, the blessing 7](#_Toc24617251)

[Birth and Rebirth 12](#_Toc24617252)

[The Fourth Tool: HaShem’s Blessings 13](#_Toc24617253)

[The Root of Maaser (Tithing) 15](#_Toc24617254)

[The Fifth Tool: Wives 16](#_Toc24617255)

[Leah, the wife for the firstborn 16](#_Toc24617256)

[Rachel, the wife for the Physical Mission (Bilhah) 18](#_Toc24617257)

[Bilhah - Rachel’s Handmaid 19](#_Toc24617258)

[Zilpah - Leah’s Handmaid 19](#_Toc24617259)

[The Sixth Tool: Children 20](#_Toc24617260)

[The Seventh Tool: New Name: Israel 20](#_Toc24617261)

[Rachamim 23](#_Toc24617262)

[Limiting the Exile 24](#_Toc24617263)

[Reuben 26](#_Toc24617264)

[Yissachar and Zevulun 26](#_Toc24617265)

[Antoninus and Rebbi 28](#_Toc24617266)

[Angels on the Way 30](#_Toc24617267)

[The Tower of Babel vs. the Ladder 30](#_Toc24617268)

[Laban, Babel, and Egyptian Slavery 33](#_Toc24617269)

[Yaaqob’s Enslavement 33](#_Toc24617270)

[Babel 33](#_Toc24617271)

[Egyptian Slavery 34](#_Toc24617272)

[Observations 34](#_Toc24617273)

[Later History 35](#_Toc24617274)

[Conclusion 35](#_Toc24617275)



In this study I would like to take a mystical approach to understand the tapestry of the Torah as it applies to Yaaqob - יַעֲקֹב Avinu. To do this, I will examine several incidents in Yaaqob’s life and attempt to show how he fulfilled not only his mission, but also the mission of Esav - עֵשָׂו, his brother. To fulfill Esav’s mission, as well as his own mission, will require that Yaaqob have his own tools *and* the same ‘tools’ that Esav would need to perform his mission. Let’s begin by looking at the ‘missions’.

# The Two Missions

Esav and Yaaqob were given two different missions:

**Yaaqob was meant to do the Avodat hapnim,[[1]](#footnote-1) the inner spiritual work of making the world a dwelling place for HaShem.**

Yaaqob’s mission is to create harmony between the physical, mundane life of the field (Esav’s place) and the spiritual life of the tents of study and prayer. The vision of the ladder[[2]](#footnote-2) is, at one and the same time, an expression of Yaaqob’s mission, and an expression of HaShem’s assurance that Yaaqob is capable of fulfilling this mission - of creating a merger of these two opposites, the physical and the spiritual.

**Esav was meant to do the Avodat hachutz,[[3]](#footnote-3) to take the fruits of the field and elevate them for HaShem,[[4]](#footnote-4) while at the same time conquering his own Yetzer HaRa.**

Leah was destined for Esav while Rachel was destined for Yaaqob. Leah could have prayed for Esav to repent. But when she saw that Yaaqob took the blessings of Yitzchak and that even Esav’s nuclear family had given up on him, she realized she needed to pray to marry Yaaqob.

We learn the power of tefilah from Leah. Not only did she not marry Esav, but she merited to marry Yaaqob first. Because she married Yaaqob first, her mission was switched with Rachel. She took on the Avodat hapnim, the spiritual mission. Rachel, in this switch, took on the Avodat hachutz, the physical side.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe[[5]](#footnote-5) explains that the fact that Esav was naturally inclined toward idolatry was not, in and of itself, a negative thing. It meant that his ordained mission in life was the conquest of evil rather than the cultivation of good.

The Sefat Emet[[6]](#footnote-6) says that when Yaaqob came in to Yitzchak he said, “I am Esav your firstborn”, he meant to say, “I’ve taken on the cloak of Esav’s responsibilities, the mission of the inner world along with the mission to elevate the outer world.” At that moment he merited Leah as his soul mate to help him complete his role. Rachel could have easily argued that she would take on a double role, but instead she gave over her role to her sister. She could’ve said, “Leah caused all the problems by acquiescing to Lavan instead of refusing to go to the wedding ceremony. I don’t have to sacrifice myself for this.” Or she could have insisted on marrying first while Leah would marry later. But she didn’t. She gave up the signs and her chance at fulfilling her destiny to save her sister from shame.

It wasn’t just the switching of the order of marriages, but a switching of roles for all generations. Rachel gave over her role of Avodat hapnim to Leah and took over Leah’s outer role. The central aspect of Yaaqob was his inner role and whoever he married first would complement that world. The signs Rachel gave over to Leah were about how to support Yaaqob in that mission. Rachel, knowing the power of tefilah that got Leah this far could have prayed, “Let me fulfill my intended mission and let Leah marry second”. But she didn’t and instead gave over her rightful position with a full heart to Leah. Hashem said, “You, who didn’t cry and pray then, may cease crying and praying now”. The avot although they faced challenges, maintained their identity. But Rachel sacrificed her very identity to save her sister from shame. It is this incredible mesirat nefesh[[7]](#footnote-7) that will bring her children back to their borders and ultimately bring the Geula.

In this also lies the deeper meaning of the midrash that describes Yaaqob and Esav fighting in the womb “over the inheritance of the two worlds” (i.e., the material world and the “world to come”).

***Bereshit (Genesis) 25:21-23*** *And Yitzchak entreated HaShem for his wife, because she was barren; and HaShem let Himself be entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. 22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said: ‘If it be so, wherefore do I live? ’ And she went to inquire of HaShem. 23 And HaShem said unto her: Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.[[8]](#footnote-8)*

This would seem to be one area in which they would have no quarrel: the Esav we know desires the materialism of the physical world and shuns everything that is G-dly and spiritual, while the reverse is true of Yaaqob. So, what were they fighting over?

Explains the Rebbe: The “Olam HaBa - the world to come” is not a reality that is disconnected from our present existence. Rather, it is the *result* of our present-day efforts in dealing with and perfecting the material world. The world of Mashiach is the culmination of all positive achievements of history, the era in which the cosmic yield of mankind’s every good deed will come to light.

Yet both Yaaqob and Esav recognize the necessity for **both** of “the two worlds”, for the process and its outcome. The “perfectly pious” man also requires the material world as the vehicle that leads to ultimate perfection. And the “conqueror” also sees perfection as the goal to which his efforts lead. For although his purpose in life is defined by the process itself, a process, by definition, must have a goal.

So, this is their “fight”. Yaaqob and Esav each lay claim to *both* worlds as part of their life’s endeavor.

But their priorities are reversed. To the Yaaqobs of the world, the material world is but a tool, a means to an end. To its Esavs, man’s material involvements and the struggles they entail are what life is all about. A futuristic vision of perfection is necessary, but only as a reference-point that provides coherence and direction to the “real” business of life.

Before the sin, Adam HaRishon and the entire world was in a state of pure, unadulterated tov.[[9]](#footnote-9) Standing before him was the Eitz HaDaat,[[10]](#footnote-10) symbolizing the concept of “move away from evil” and the Eitz HaChaim,[[11]](#footnote-11) symbolizing the concept of “do good”. Adam’s eating from the Eitz HaDaat caused evil to be mixed into him and into the world.

The Ohr Gedalyahu[[12]](#footnote-12) explains that the Avot were toiling to correct the sin of Adam, each one picking up where the other had left off. Yaaqob, the third of the Avot, was an “pure man”, in the state of Adam before the sin. His mission was to “do good” to “dwell in the tents”, totally devoted to tov, to the Eitz HaChaim.

Esav was born a mixture of good and evil, he was “a man of the field”. His mission was to subjugate the evil to the good, to vanquish the Eitz HaDaat.

Together they would have continued the work of their father and grandfather. The Midrash teaches that, had Esav accepted his role, each would have had six tribes.

Yaaqob had to also assume the service of Esav. He could no longer just dwell in the tents. He now had to confront evil and control it. He ‘became’ Esav. He’d father all twelve tribes. The blessings were now rightfully his - the assistance and support necessary for this battle.

Yaaqob received the blessings and immediately leaves his ‘tents’ — he goes out into exile. Ultimately, he confronts and battles the ministering angel of Esav, the yetzer hara himself, and emerges wounded but victorious. His named is changed to Israel. We Bne Israel, the descendants of Yaaqob, continue to wage this battle until today.

The tension between them over their differing visions of the “two worlds” is not a negative thing. It is the result of two world views, both positive and necessary, both indispensable components of man’s mission in life.

Yaaqob and Esav are the prototypes for two types of souls, each with a distinct role to play in the fulfillment of the Divine purpose in creation. Maimonides calls these two spiritual types “the perfectly pious” and “the one who conquers his inclinations”; Rabbi Schneur Zalman refers to them as the “Tzaddik” and the “Beinoni”. Humanity is divided into these two types, writes Rabbi Schneur Zalman in his *Tanya,* because “there are two kinds of gratification before G-d. The first is generated by the good achieved by the perfectly righteous. But G-d also delights in the conquest of evil which is still at its strongest and most powerful in the heart, through the efforts of the ordinary, unperfected individual”.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The conquest of evil, Esav’s mission, is really the conquest of his animal desire[[14]](#footnote-14) in favor of his desire to serve HaShem. This ‘evil’ is actually his evil inclination. This ‘evil’ will become manifest as the ‘angel of Esav’, as we shall see.

Esav represented material power. Yaaqob on the other hand represented spiritual power.

# Food and Tools

One thing that is quite noticeable is that there is food involved with these tools. This begs the question: What is food?

We can understand the answer to this question by examining what happens when we stop eating.

After a few days, or less, we start to become weak and faint. If we continue without food for an extended period, we will die. Therefore, Chazal (Our Sages) teach that food is used to connect the soul to the body. It is used to connect the physical and the spiritual components. This explains why the korbanot (sacrifices) are called “food” for HaShem. HaShem does not eat in the sense that we eat. HaShem has no physicality. Thus we understand that HaShem’s food is that which connects Him to our physical world. He is The “soul” of the world He is the spiritual component of our physical world. In fact, the Hebrew word korbanot means “to draw near”.

Eating connects the body and the neshama, the soul. Without food, the neshama would leave the body.

The most intimate connection in this world is the connection between a neshama and the body. This most potent connection is maintained through eating. The Sages see the neshama and the body as the ultimate opposites, the ultimate male and female connection. The neshama is a spark of the infinite subsumed in a finite body. Finite and infinite truly are the opposites, which are cemented by eating. The combination of body and soul is something that we cannot understand. We must assume that it is a mystery known only to HaShem.

Food is the energy, which bonds two opposites together. Food was the last thing created. It was created as the energy, which binds these opposites.

One can understand food and eating by looking at what happens when one stops eating. If we stop eating for a short time, the neshama begins separating from the body and we manifest this separation by feeling weak. If we stop eating for a longer period, the body actually feels faint in response to the continued separation of the neshama from the body. If we continue this pattern, the neshama will completely separate from the body and we manifest this complete separation with death.

HaShem is spiritual as the neshama is spiritual; we as a people are physical like the body. Nevertheless, the Divine Presence can rest among us just as the neshama rests in the body. However, this was only true when the Beit HaMikdash stood and we brought korbanot, sacrifices. Through the “food” of the korbanot, the Divine Presence rested among us. However, now that the korbanot have been taken away, the Divine Presence has also been taken away from us just as the neshama leaves the body when there is no food.

The parallel of food in the spiritual world is the Korban (which means something that brings closeness from the root *kirbah),* a sacrifice. Sacrifices maintain contact, as it were, between HaShem’s infinite presence and the finite world. The place of sacrifice is the Beit HaMikdash. That is why the Holy place contained food, the bread of The Presence. The korbanot, the sacrifices were called HaShem’s food.

**First tool:** The *becorah*, the birthright. Esav sold this for a bowl of red lentils.[[15]](#footnote-15)

**Second tool:** The garment of:

**Adam => Noach => Nimrod => Esav => Yosef**

Yaaqob was roasting some goat meat and preparing it for his father when he got the garments.[[16]](#footnote-16)

**Third tool:** The blessing, the bracha. Yitzchak had just finished eating the goat meat when he gave the bracha.[[17]](#footnote-17) This bracha took place on Passover.[[18]](#footnote-18)

**Fourth tool:** HaShem’s Blessings.

**Fifth tool:** Wives - Esav’s designated wife and Yaaqob’s designated wife. Leah and Rachel are both given to Yaaqob after a feast.[[19]](#footnote-19)

**Sixth tool:** Thirteen children.

**Seventh tool:** A second name: *Yaaqob* and *Israel.* Jews do not eat the sinew of the thigh-vein because of this incident.[[20]](#footnote-20) This new name was given on Passover.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Now, let’s examine each of tools in greater detail.

# The First Tool: The becorah, the birthright.

This ‘birthright’ is used to elevate the physical for spiritual purposes.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 25:29-34*** *And Yaaqob sod pottage; and Esav came in from the field, and he was faint. 30 And Esav said to Yaaqob: ‘Let me swallow, I pray thee, some of this red, red pottage; for I am faint. ’ Therefore, was his name called Edom. 31 And Yaaqob said: ‘Sell me first thy birthright. ’ 32 And Esav said: ‘Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall the birthright do to me? ’ 33 And Yaaqob said: ‘Swear to me first ’; and he swore unto him; and he sold his birthright unto Yaaqob. 34 And Yaaqob gave Esav bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way. So Esav despised his birthright.*

Esav is the firstborn and has all the rights of the firstborn until he sells the becorah to Yaaqob for some lentils. Clearly, Esav saw no value in the becorah, because the becorah came with responsibilities and privileges that Esav has now spumed and sold to Yaaqob. This is a major turning point in Yaaqob’s mission. He has now purchased the becorah. He has become the firstborn! It is noteworthy that **he has not abdicated his previous mission, rather he has taken on an additional mission.[[22]](#footnote-22)** He has the mission of the firstborn and his own mission. This is an important concept which will come into play later to explain many of the perplexing events later in Yaaqob’s life.

# The Second Tool: Esav’s Garment

***Bereshit (Genesis)*** *27:15 And Rebekah took the choicest garments of Esav her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Yaaqob her younger son.*

What are these choice garments and where did they come from? The midrash give us some insight:

***Genesis Rabbah 63:13*** *BEHOLD,* ***1*** *AM AT THE POINT TO DIE. Another interpretation is that Nimrod was seeking to slay him on account of the garment which had belonged to Adam [and which Esav now possessed], for whenever he put it on and went out into the field, all the beasts and birds in the world would come and flock around him.*

Thus we understand the Esav’s choicest garments were stolen from Nimrod, but where did Nimrod get them? The midrash says he got them from Adam![[23]](#footnote-23) Where did Adam get them from?

***Bereshit (Genesis) 3:21*** And the HaShem God made for Adam and for his wife garments(ketunot - כאניות)of skins, and clothed them.

After Adam sinned his garment for light was changed to a garment of skin. Physical skin (serpent’s skin) to replace skin of light. Esav was supposed to elevate the physical. This garment gave him power over the physical world, just as Adam was given dominion over the physical world. Animals feared the one wearing this garment.

*Meam Loez*: Esav had extremely precious leather garments, which were handed down from Adam. These were the garments that God Himself had made, as the Torah says, ‘God made vestments of skin for Adam and his wife”.[[24]](#footnote-24)

They garments were more beautiful than the finest royal robes. Esav kept them in his mother’s chest so that they would always be ready. If his father called him, he ׳would be able to put them on immediately. Nimrod had inherited this valuable cloak that had once belonged to Adam. This cloak contained pictures of all sorts of animals and birds, and when Nimrod went out in the field, these creatures would come to him and he could take any that he wanted without effort. Esav stole this garment from Nimrod.

It appears certain that there was more than one such garment. Thus, when God gave them to Adam, they are referred to in the plural, as “robes of skin”.[[25]](#footnote-25) Here too, the Torah speaks of them in the plural as the “garments” of Esav.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Some say that this time Esav did not wear his special garments, and for this reason it took him much longer than usual to obtain game.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Actually, these garments did not have a pleasant fragrance until Yaaqob put them on and consecrated them. The Torah therefore says, “[ Yitzchak] smelled the fragrance of *his* (Yaaqob’s) garments”. Earlier, the Torah referred to them as Esav’s garments.[[28]](#footnote-28) Instead of calling them *‘his* garments” here, the Torah should have simply referred to them as *“the* garments” since they belonged to Esav. But the Torah teaches us that although they were in Esav’s possession for a while, they were only in his safekeeping, and therefore their fragrance was not detectable. Now that they became the property of Yaaqob, their true nature became evident.[[29]](#footnote-29)

(The above pasuk uses a unique word: ketunot - כאניות. This word is used in only one other place in Genesis: Yosef’s coat of many color.)

*End Meam Loez*

***Bereshit (Genesis) 37:3*** *Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a coat* (ketunot - כאניות) *of many colours.*

This suggests that Yosef’s coat of many colors is also Adam’s garment.[[30]](#footnote-30)

# The Third Tool: The bracha, the blessing

At this point, Yaaqob owns the becorah, but he has not yet acquired the blessing which will enable him to fulfill Esav’s mission. Thus, Yitzchak must bestow the blessing on his ‘firstborn’. He must empower Yaaqob to perform Esav’s mission.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 27:18*** *And he came unto his father, and said: ‘My father’; and he said: ‘Here am I; who art thou, my son?’ 19 And Yaaqob said unto his father: ‘****I am Esav thy first-born;*** *I have done according as thou badest me. Arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me.’ 20 And Yitzchak said unto his son: 'How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son?’ And he said: ‘Because the LORD thy God sent me good speed.’ 21 And Yitzchak said unto Yaaqob: ‘Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esav or not.’ 22 And Yaaqob went near unto Yitzchak his father; and he felt him, and said: ‘The voice is the voice of Yaaqob, but the hands are the hands of Esav.’ 23 And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esav’s hands; so he blessed him. 24 And he said: ‘Art thou my very son Esav?’ And he said: I am.’ 25 And he said: ‘Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son’s venison, that my soul may bless thee. ’ And he brought it near to him, and he did eat; and he brought him wine, and he drank. 26 And his father Yitzchak said unto him: ‘Come near now, and kiss me, my son.’ 27 And he came near, and kissed him. And he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said: See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD hath blessed. 28 So God give thee of the dew of heaven, and of the fat places of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine. 29 Let peoples serve thee, and nations bow down to thee. Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother’s sons bow down to thee. Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be every one that blesseth thee.*

The following comments from the ArtScroll on *Bereshit* and *Shir HaShirim* lend us some insight into the *hands* and *voice*:

*v.22 The voice is Yaaqob’s voice:* Yaaqob wields power only by his voice [i.e. Yaaqob exemplifies spiritual strength]; *but the hands are Esav’s hands*—Esav gains dominion only by his hands [i.e., Esav exemplifies material might.]

When Yaaqob’s voice withdraws within itself [the word קול, *voice* is spelled defectively, without the ו so it can be read, ‘the voice of Yaaqob is *lightened’ (Yafeh Toar)]* — and Jews do not make proper use of their voices by praying and studying Torah, *then*, *Esav’s hands have dominion,...* but conversely when the voice of Yaaqob rings out in the synagogues, Yaaqob cannot be dominated — for Esav has no hands [i.e. In such a case Esav’s hands have no power to encroach upon Yaaqob].

Midrashic maxim:[[31]](#footnote-31) ‘When Yaaqob’s voice is heard [i.e. when the Jews are religiously active], then Esav’s [i.e. the heathens’] hands cannot overpower them...

All the heathens assembled before one of their wise men and asked him: ‘Do you think that we can subjugate this people’? The wise man replied, ‘Go around to their synagogues and schools, and if you find there children with voices uplifted, you cannot subjugate them; if not, you can, for thus did their ancestor assure them: “The voice is the voice of Yaaqob” - when the voice of Yaaqob rings out in the synagogues, Esav’s might is powerless against them.’

Perhaps, as Yafeh Toar explains, the interpretation is that since these two opposites, Yaaqob’s voice and Esav’s hands, cannot coexist simultaneously, the Sages perceive the verse to intimate that either the voice is the voice of Yaaqob - or - the hands are the hands of Esav: while one is strong the other is powerless.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The Midrash continues: The voice is the voice of Yaaqob - the voice of Yaaqob cries out at what the hands did to him [i.e. at the incredible slaughters perpetrated against Israel by the descendants of Esav/Edom (Rome). The Midrash specifically cites the cries of the accursed Hadrian who slew eighty thousand myriads at Betar in approximately 135 C.E. where the Bar Kochba revolt was finally crushed with incredible slaughter.]

The Talmud[[33]](#footnote-33) interprets the reference of Esav’s hands to refer to the Roman Empire which destroyed the Temple and exiled us from our land.

Similarly, the Talmud[[34]](#footnote-34) observes that ‘wherever a prayer is effective, a descendant of Yaaqob must be among those who uttered it; whenever a war is victorious, Esav’s descendants must have had a hand in it.

*End ArtScroll comments.*

Yitzchak wanted his two children to be in one nation like Israel and the tribe of Levi during the days of the Temple. He wanted to bless Esav with abundant wealth, abundant grain and wine, and strength for fighting wars and governing. And Yaaqob’s descendants would be set aside only for the service of HaShem, like the tribe of Levi, and the children of Esav would provide food for them and protect them from all difficulty like Bne Israel did later for the tribe of Levi. This is the famous approach of the Malbim.

Notice, in v.19, that Yaaqob declares that he is the firstborn. Did he lie? (No, he had already acquired the becorah.) Can you steal a blessing? (No, spiritual acquisitions depend on the correct acquisition.) Consider that Yaaqob is known as the pillar of truth, as it states in sefer Micah:

***Micah 7:20*** *Give truth to Yaaqob, mercy to Abraham, as Thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.*

Since Yaaqob represents truth, we must begin to understand that somehow Yaaqob has also become Esav. He has become the becorah, the firstborn. As the becorah he must have Yitzchak’s blessing in order to accomplish the mission of Esav. He did not lie, rather he informed his father that he had taken on Esav’s mission and therefore he required the bracha, the blessing.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 27:33-36*** *Yitzchak trembled violently and said, ‘Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me?* *I ate it just before you came and 1 blessed him - and indeed he will be blessed!’ When Esav heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, ‘Bless me - me too, my father!’ But he said, ‘Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.’ Esav said, ‘Isn't he rightly named Yaaqob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: he took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!’ Then he asked, ‘Haven’t you reserved any blessing for me?’*

Rashi to Bereshit (Genesis) 27:36 **And he said, “Is it for this reason that he was named Jacob** - הֲכִי is an expression denoting the interrogative, as in (below 29:15): “Is it because (הֲכִי) you are my kinsman…?” Was he named Jacob (יַעֲקֽב) because of the future, because he was destined to deceive me (לְעָקְבֵנִי) ? Midrash Tanchuma (Buber, Toledoth 23) [asks]: Why did Isaac shudder? He said, “Perhaps I am guilty of an iniquity, for I have blessed the younger son before the older one, and thus altered the order of the relationship.” [Thereupon], Esau started crying, “He has already deceived me twice!” His father said to him, “What did he do to you?” He replied, “He took my birthright.” He [Isaac] said, “That is why I was troubled and shuddered, for [I was afraid that] perhaps I [had] transgressed the line of strict justice, [but] now [that I know that] I actually blessed the firstborn, ‘he too shall be blessed’.”

We can see from the blessing that the pshat[[35]](#footnote-35) indicates that they were all material blessings. In addition to what he needs to live well, he also is given power over his brethren. From this we learn that Esav’s original mission was to subdue the earth and control the people. Esav’s mission was the physical aspect of creation. He was supposed to conquer his own evil inclination and provide the material needs for Yaaqob to carry out his spiritual mission. From this mission we can begin to understand that Yaaqob’s original mission, which he retained, involves the spiritual aspects of the world. He was to be a tent dweller. Yaaqob is described as a dweller of tents, which Chazal interpret to refer to the tents of the yeshiva of Shem and Eber.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 25:27*** *And the boys grew; and trapping was in Esav’s mouth, a man of the field; and Yaaqob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents.*

***Bamidbar (Numbers) 24:5*** *How goodly are thy tents, O Yaaqob, thy dwellings, O Israel!*

Yitzchak fully understood the nature of his two sons. He loved Esav but this did not blind him to the fact that Yaaqob would be the heir of the covenant. Therefore, Yitzchak prepared two sets of blessings, one for Esav, the other for Yaaqob. He blessed Esav[[36]](#footnote-36) with the gifts he felt he would require: wealth and power: “May God give you heaven’s dew and earth’s richness, an abundance of grain and new wine”, that is, wealth. “May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers and may the sons of your mother bow down to you”, that is, power. These are not the covenantal blessings.

The Netivot Shalom[[37]](#footnote-37) writes that Yitzchak saw *chesed* (kindness) in Yaaqob and *Gevurah* (strength), his own attribute, in Esav. This is why he loved him. The verse says, “The beginning of knowledge is fear of HaShem”. *Yirah* and strength are interconnected. Yitzchak felt that Esav would be the one to transmit these attributes to the next generation. **He saw that Esav’s mission would be to elevate this world for HaShem.** Therefore, Yitzchak wanted to bless Esav with the blessings of the physical world. **The Malbim notes that ideally Esav and Yaaqob could have formed a Yissachar-Zevulun type partnership.** But when Esav gave up his firstborn rights, Yaaqob took on his role.

Esav’s primary battle was to use his Gevurah to conquer his yetzer HaRa - his evil inclination. His job was to battle his own lusts. Unfortunately, he failed at this task.

By taking on Esav’s mission, **Yaaqob now has two missions:** A physical and a spiritual mission. The becorah was necessary for the performance of both missions as the becorah was also the priest of the family.

Yitzchak gave Yaaqob a second blessing that allowed Yaaqob to perform his first and primary mission.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 28:1-4*** *And Yitzchak called Yaaqob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him: ‘Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. 2 Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother’s father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother’s brother. 3 And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a congregation of peoples; 4 and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land of thy sojournings, which God gave unto Abraham.’*

Rashi comments on the blessing to Yaaqob: ‘“May God give you...’ - May He give, and continue to give.”

Yitzchak mentions the blessing promised to Avraham. He mentions Eretz Israel. This was the blessing which Yaaqob was going to receive, from Yitzchak, all along, for his primary mission.

Yaaqob must step up and accept the dual role, despite his own proclivities and preferences. He must acquire both blessings - the physical, political and economic blessing that Yitzchak had intended to give to Esav, as well as the spiritual blessing - the promise HaShem had made to Abraham which included inheriting the Land of Israel - that had always been intended for him.

The ‘blessing’ has an interesting linguistic parallel between the incident where Esav cried when he realized his blessing had been taken; and the incident where Yaaqob cried on meeting Rachel:[[38]](#footnote-38)

Bereshit (Genesis) 27:38 … And Esav lifted up his voice - וַיִּשָּׂא עֵשָׂו קֹלוֹ, וַיֵּבְךְּ

Bereshit (Genesis) 29:11 … and lifted up his (Yaaqob) voice, and wept - וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת-קֹלוֹ, וַיֵּבְךְּ

This linguistic connection teaches us that these two events are related. Yaaqob’s cries are related to Esav’s cries. Esav’s cries, in effect, caused Yaaqob’s cries.

There is a major connection between Yaaqob’s meeting Rachel and Yaaqob meeting Esav. The following table details the elements in common between these two incidents:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Yaaqob at the Well** | **Yaaqob Meeting Esav** |
| **Gen. 29:2** Three flocks of sheep. | **Gen. 32:20** Three groups of sheep and other animals. |
| **Gen. 29:4** My Brothers, where are you from? | **Gen. 33:5** 'Who are these with thee?'  |
| **Gen. 29:9** Rachel comes | **Gen. 33:7** came Joseph near and Rachel |
| **Gen. 29:10** Yaaqob approached | **Gen. 33:3** he came near to his brother |
| **Gen. 29:11** Yaaqob kissed Rachel, and raised his voice and cried. | **Gen. 33:4** Esav ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him |

Chazal teach that Yaaqob’s cries, on meeting Rachel, were caused by one of three incidents:

The second reason for Yaaqob’s weeping, brought by the midrash, was his foreseeing that Rachel would not be buried together with him (*Gen. Rabbah* loc. cit.)

***Midrash Rabbah - Genesis LXX:12*** *… AND LIFTED UP HIS VOICE, AND WEPT.[[39]](#footnote-39) Why did he weep? He said thus: ' What is written about Eliezer, Abraham's servant, when he went to fetch Rebekah? And the servant took ten camels, etc. (Gen. XXIV, 10). While I have come without a single ring or bracelet.’ Another reason why he wept was because he foresaw that she would not be buried together with him. It was this that she [Rachel] said to her [Leah]: Therefore he shall lie with thee to-night,[[40]](#footnote-40) meaning, with thee he will sleep [his last sleep], but not with me.*

If Yaaqob sees that Rachel will not be buried with him, then it makes sense that he would be worried that Esav would kill Rachel at their encounter after Yaaqob leaves Haran.

Yaaqob had to suffer as a consequence for the tears that he provoked in his brother Esav. He would have to suffer the loss of Rachel. And in last week’s parsha, we started to see those effects playing themselves out. When Laban withheld Rachel from Yaaqob for seven years of labor and then switched her out under the marriage canopy, Yaaqob was suffering the loss of Rachel. And now, in this week’s parsha, we are seeing a whole other iteration of that. Here, in this moment of encounter with Esav, Yaaqob again fears the imminent loss of Rachel. That’s why the very same language is being used. That’s why it feels like déjà vu.

Yaaqob has good reason to fear losing Rachel at this moment. After all, Esav is advancing towards him and with him are four hundred armed men. This is the same Esav whom he wronged in an outrageous act of betrayal. The same Esav who swore, in a fury, that he would kill him. The same Esav from whom he fled in a panicked hurry, and has been hiding from for these twenty years. And now, Esav is on the warpath. When Esav finally comes upon Yaaqob and his sprawling family of wives and children, there’s no telling what he will do to them. This time, Yaaqob could lose his beloved Rachel for good.

Yaaqob makes a bold choice. When the two brothers are finally standing face-to-face, Yaaqob looks Esav in the eye and says:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 33:11*** *Please take my gift which has been brought to you, for God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have all.*

The plain meaning of Yaaqob’s words are: “Please take my gift” (as we’ve rendered it in the translation). In other words, Yaaqob is referring to the herds of animals that he sent to Esav as an offering, a gift. But if you’re a Hebrew reader, it’s hard to miss the double entendre here. The word used here, יִ תָ כְ רִּ ב ,doesn’t usually mean “gift.” It means “blessing.” It’s the same word which was used, over and over, in the account back in Chapter 27 in which Yaaqob stole Esav’s blessing in the first place. And now? Take my blessing, Yaaqob is saying. I once took a blessing from you. Now I’m giving it back. Yaaqob insists, Esav accepts, and the brothers part ways in peace. A reconciliation has been reached - and Rachel and the rest of Yaaqob’s family are safe.

If we look closely at the episode where Yaaqob takes the blessing of Yitzchak we will find that it is a mirror image of the reunion of Yaaqob and Esav twenty years later. This reunion is all about healing their relationship by ‘undoing’ the past.

In this meeting Yaaqob asks Esav to ‘take the blessing’.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Yitzchak’s Blessing** | **Yaaqob & Esav Reconcile** |
| **Brothers in conflict** | **Gen. 27:41** Esav Plans to kill Yaaqob because he took the blessing. | **Gen. 33:1** Esav meets Yaaqob with 400 men. Yaaqob assumed war was coming. |
| **One brother is wealthy** | **Gen. 27:28** Yitzchak blesses Yaaqob with material wealth. | **Gen. 33:11** Yaaqob has ‘all’. Yaaqob gives Esav massive amount of livestock. (Gen. 32:15-16) |
| **Master over the other** | **Gen. 27:29** Yitzchak makes Yaaqob master over Esav. | **Gen. 33:5** & **14** Yaaqob calls himself ‘Esav’s servant’. |
| **Bowing** | **Gen. 27:29** Yitzchak makes Rivka’s progeny bow to him. | **Gen. 33:3** Yaaqob bowed seven times to Esav. |
| **Nation bowing** | **Gen. 27:29** Yitzchak makes nations bow to Yaaqob. | **Gen. 33:6-7** Yaaqob’s wives and children bow to Esav. |
| **Tears** | **Gen. 27:34** Esav cries bitterly (anguish and rage) over the lost blessing. | **Gen. 33:4** Yaaqob and Esav wept on each other’s neck. True healing takes place. |
| **Blessing taken** | **Gen. 27:33** Yitzchak confirms Yaaqob’s blessing. | **Gen. 33:11** Yaaqob tells Esav to take his blessing. |
| **Come Close** | **Gen. 27:27** Yaaqob came near to Yitzchak. Yitzchak puts his hands on Yaaqob. | **Gen. 33:4** Esav comes close to Yaaqob and wraps his hands around him in an embrace. |
| **Kissing** | **Gen. 27:26** Yitzchak asks Yaaqob to kiss him. **Gen. 27:16** Yaaqob’s *neck* was covered with goat skins. | **Gen. 33:4** Esav kisses Yaaqob on the *neck*. |

The above connections are suggestive as to why the Midrash connects these two incidents:

***Midrash Rabbah - Genesis LXXIX:4*** *They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.[[41]](#footnote-41) ' They that sow in tears’ applies to Yaaqob, who sowed the blessings in tears-My father will peradventure feel me;[[42]](#footnote-42) ’Shall reap in joy’-So God give thee, etc.[[43]](#footnote-43) Though he goeth on his way (Ps. loc. cit.)-Then Yaaqob went on his journey;[[44]](#footnote-44) weeping-And he lifted up his voice, and wept;[[45]](#footnote-45) That beareth the drawing [E.V. ’ measure ‘] of seed - he drew his seed and went on.[[46]](#footnote-46) He shall come home with joy, bearing his sheaves-alumothaw (ib.)-behold him returning bearing his young men and young women.[[47]](#footnote-47)*

The Midrash thus intimately connects Esav’s initial tears when he was informed that Yaaqob had received his blessing, with his tears on meeting Esav when he returned to Canaan from Haran. The Sages tell us, in effect, that one set of tears created another set of tears. Just as the above table of connections seems to suggest.

The Midrash teaches us that this was prophetically connected by David’s Psalm:

***Tehillim (Psalms) 126:1-6*** *A Song of Ascents. When HaShem brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like unto them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the nations: ' HaShem hath done great things with these.' HaShem hath done great things with us; we are rejoiced. Turn our captivity, HaShem, as the streams in the dry land. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Though he goeth on his way weeping that beareth the measure of seed, he shall come home with joy, bearing his sheaves.*

# Birth and Rebirth[[48]](#footnote-48)

If you look carefully at the story of the blessing you will see that it’s their birth story all over again. It goes back to the moment when both brothers were in the womb. It’s a birth story because in the womb it was dark and in the womb you couldn’t see and in the womb there was a struggle between two children. And the two children they were running, they were going fast.[[49]](#footnote-49) In the story also, Yaaqob’s going fast. How’d you find the food so fast,[[50]](#footnote-50) Yitzhak asks Yaaqob.

And then Yaaqob rushes out and when he rushes out, who comes out first? Right, Yaaqob comes out first, comes out of father’s domain first. The only difference between these stories is that, instead of being in mother’s womb, they’re in father’s domain. And the two children are going to come out one after another, but this time Yaaqob comes out first and when he comes, what does he come out, he’s wearing the cloaks of Esav. Remember when Esav came out first the first time? How was he described? “Kulo ka’aderet se’ar”, right? “Kulo ka’aderet se’ar”[[51]](#footnote-51) means it was as if he was wearing a hairy cloak. Well when Esav came out first it was as if he was wearing a hairy cloak. When Yaaqob came out first this time, from father’s Yaaqob, he’s actually wearing a hairy cloak. He’s literally wearing the cloaks of Esav. It’s a birth story.

The two children are struggling and just as in birth, just as in the womb, what were they struggling for? What were they struggling for? What do identical twins struggle for in the womb? We talked about how they were identical twins, how they looked different because there was as struggle for resources going on, the blood from mother, right? And one gets more of it and becomes ruddy and red and the other becomes pale and sallow. The struggle begins already in the womb, a struggle for scarce resources granted by parent and what, indeed, is the struggle over the Brachot about? What are the Brachot? The Brachot are also about resources. Resources from parent.

But this time the parent isn’t Yitzhak, the parent is HaShem. “Let HaShem grant you from the dew of the heavens and from the fats of the earth...” abundant food and abundant, right? This is the blessing. The blessing is, once again, over scarce resources. And perhaps the Torah evokes the memories of the womb in this story as a way, again, from Rivka’s perspective of telling you what this story means from Rivka’s perspective. From Rivka’s perspective this was supposed to be a replay of the birth story... this was the moment where, if Yaaqob could do it right, it would all change. He would come out with a new name, he would shed his name Yaaqob, he wouldn’t be that Yaaqob anymore. He would be straightforward and he would get those resources fair and square, by making his case to his father.

But it failed. And when the story failed, instead of Yaaqob getting a new name, he’s just confirmed with his old name: “ha-chi karah shmo Yaaqob”.[[52]](#footnote-52) The words “ha-chi karah shmo Yaaqob”, the last letter of “ha-chi”, yud (י), right, evokes “yikrah shmo Yaaqob” which is the exact same words from Yaaqob’s original naming. “Vayikrah shmo Yaaqob”[[53]](#footnote-53) when Yaaqob is named Yaaqob by his father. It just happens again. Yaaqob is confirmed as Yaaqob and there’s a failure and the failure, I suggest to you, is signified by the tears.

When babies are born, they cry. You know the baby is healthy when they cry. Presumably, Yaaqob and Esav when they were born, the first thing that happened after they were born is they cried. Now, in this replay of the birth story. You’ve got the two children leaving father’s tent, but only one of them cries and the cries are bitter tears. They’re Esav’s cry. “vayisah Esav kolo v’yevch”[[54]](#footnote-54) the bitter tears of Esav. Tears provoked by Yaaqob. Yaaqob doesn’t cry because Yaaqob is the aggressor in this case.

Something’s wrong. When a baby comes out of the womb, he doesn’t cry, something’s wrong. Maybe it’s the Torah’s way of saying something’s wrong with this birth story; you worry if a child doesn’t cry. You see because if there’s twins born and they both cry, they’re both healthy. When two people cry, that’s okay. But even as a parent and you have two kids and they’re upstairs and you don’t know what’s going on and they’re struggling with each other and then one cries, that’s not a good sign. Right? You know you got to go upstairs. If they both cry, all right they’re both crying, I mean, whatever. But if one is crying, is signifies one is being victimized, the other is the aggressor, that’s not

good. And what happened here is one was being victimized, the other is the aggressor.

# The Fourth Tool: HaShem’s Blessings[[55]](#footnote-55)

*Maasei Avot Siman L ’Banim* - the actions of the Forefathers are a model for the actions of the descendants. This teaches us that Yaaqob’s story will form the basis for the development of the laws of Maaser (Tithing) found later in Debarim.[[56]](#footnote-56) The vision of the ladder provides the vision of the law of tithes. When we provide Maaser, we bring HaShem’s name into the world. This is precisely the opposite of what they attempted to do with the tower of Babel.

In Bereshit (Genesis) chapter 2816-22, Yaaqob realizes that he has been sleeping at the connection point between heaven and earth. He *knows* that ‘HaShem is in this place’.[[57]](#footnote-57) This place is the future site of the Temple.[[58]](#footnote-58) With this realization comes the desire to beseech HaShem for his own well being. At this point in his life, Yaaqob has been threatened with death by Esav, and he has been robbed of all of his possessions.

In order to force himself to honor HaShem’s faithfulness, Yaaqob vows a vow. In this vow, Yaaqob asks that HaShem be with him, as in protection and guide. Additionally, Yaaqob asks that HaShem will give him bread to eat and clothes to wear. Finally, Yaaqob asks HaShem to bring him back to Yitzchak’s house in peace. In return, Yaaqob promises three things:

1. HaShem will be his God.
2. The stone he anointed and set up will become God’s house.
3. He promises to give a tenth (a tithe) of all of his possessions.

This third promise will become the basis for tithing for all of his descendants. To demonstrate that the ladder incident forms the root for tithing, the Torah links the ladder incident with the giving of Maaser, of tithing. It will link these two incidents via the Rabbi Ishmael’s[[59]](#footnote-59) hermeneutic rules[[60]](#footnote-60) of: *Gezerah shavah[[61]](#footnote-61)* and *Davar halameid mei’inyano v’davar halameid misofo*.[[62]](#footnote-62)

The following table demonstrates some of the hermeneutic connections between the incident of Yaaqob’s ladder and the details of Maaser given to us by Moshe:

# The Root of Maaser (Tithing)

|  |
| --- |
| **Maaser - Tithing** |
|  | **Bereshit 28 - End** | **Debarim 14** ־ **The Beginning** |
| **Doubled Language****language** | 28:22 עַשֵּׂר אֲעַשְּׂרֶנּוּ surely give the tenth unto Thee. | 14:22 עַשֵּׂר תְּעַשֵּׂר Thou shalt surely tithe. |
| **Food** | 28:20 וְנָתַן-לִי לֶחֶם לֶאֱכֹל give me bread to eat. | 14:23 וְאָכַלְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ And thou shalt eat before HaShem your God. |
| **The Place of God** | 28:17 מַה-נּוֹרָא, הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה How full of awe is this place אֵין זֶה, כִּי אִם-בֵּית אֱלֹהִים None other than the, house of God | 14:23 בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר לְשַׁכֵּן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם in the place which He shall choose to cause His name to dwell there |
| **Fear of HaShem** | 28:17 וַיִּירָא, וַיֹּאמַר And he was afraid | 14:23 לְמַעַן תִּלְמַד, לְיִרְאָה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ--כָּל-הַיָּמִים that thou mayest learn to fear HaShem thy God always. |
| **Gates** | 28:17 שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמָיִם gate of heaven | 14:27, 28, 29 בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ within thy gates |
| **Spread****out****Progeny** | 28:14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. And in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest, and will bring thee back into this land; for I will not leave thee.. | 14:24 And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it (because you are so spread out), because the place is too far from thee, which HaShem thy God shall choose to set His name there, when HaShem thy God shall bless thee; **25** then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thy hand, and shalt go unto the place which HaShem thy God shall choose. **26** And thou shalt bestow the money for whatsoever thy soul desireth, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul asketh of thee; and thou shalt eat there before HaShem thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou and thy household. |
| **Blessing** | 28:14 וְנִבְרְכוּ Be blessed | 14:24 כִּי יְבָרֶכְךָ God shall bless thee |
| **You Will Return** | 28:15 וַהֲשִׁבֹתִיךָ, אֶל-הָאֲדָמָה bring thee back into this land | 14:25 וְהָלַכְתָּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם, אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose. |
| **I Will Not****Leave you****You** | 28:15 כִּי, לֹא אֶעֱזָבְךָ for I will not leave thee | 14:27 לֹא תַעַזְבֶנּוּ thou shalt not forsake him |
| **Land** | 28:13 הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שֹׁכֵב עָלֶיהָ--לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה, וּלְזַרְעֶךָ The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. | 14:27 כִּי אֵין לוֹ חֵלֶק וְנַחֲלָה, עִמָּךְ. for he hath no portion nor inheritance with thee. |

All of your children are going to give tithe; all of your children are going to give that tithe; all of the Bne Yisrael, all of the children of Israel, all the children of Yaaqob, they are eventually going to give that tithe and they are going to do it in a way - ־ right? In other words, it’s like, Yaaqob says so God, I’m going to tithe to you, I’m going to give you all this stuff. So what do you give the person, the being who has everything? What is it that you’re going to give God? I mean, what is it that God really needs? God has everything.

So God says look, I don’t need anything — I don’t need anything, you need it. Take the tithe and you yourself eat it, but here is what I want you to do. I want you to remember. I want you to remember the promise I made to you, the fact that I fulfilled that promise. Because when you were on the run, when you were an evyon, when you were a poor person, when you had nothing, you didn’t even have any food, you didn’t have anything, you didn’t have clothes to wear, you had nothing, you begged, me and you asked me for help and I promised you that I would always be with you. I promised that I wouldn’t leave you until I had brought you back here; that you were leaving the land of Israel, but you would eventually come back and I would assuredly bring you back and I would spread you out throughout the whole land, remember when I keep that promise.

When I keep that promise, when ultimately I bring Yaaqob back, when ultimately after 400 years of Egypt you come through with signs and wonders back into the land, when that happens, remember; remember that promise when I told you I wouldn’t leave you. Remember that I fulfilled that promise. Therefore, come and bring the tithe.

Wherever you are, you’re all spread out all over the place, come to that one place. Come to that place that Yaaqob in his dream said “zeh sha’ar hashamayim,” this is the gates of heaven; this is the House of God. Come to that place, build me that place. Build the rest of it. Yaaqob put the first stone in; you guys put the rest of the stones until you build that whole edifice, that House of God.

Then come to that House of God from all of the far places that I promised that I would spread you throughout the whole land. Come even if it’s far, even if you have to buy things with the tithe and then come and redeem the money when you get there to transport it. Do that and come and feast and when you do it learn, learn to do what? To be in awe of me because when tithing was first conceived of by Yaaqob, when he first made that promise that he would give me a tenth, when he did that, he was in awe. He couldn’t believe that this is the nexus between the heaven and earth. Well, you’re going to be living on the nexus of heaven and earth.

Therefore, come to that place and try to experience a little bit of that awe that Yaaqob had when he had that dream. When you eat there and when you thank God for bringing him back and not leaving Yaaqob behind, experience that awe, but don’t just experience that awe, do what I did. Learn to do what I did. What did I do? When Yaaqob was an evyon, when Yaaqob was a poor guy just on the run and he was desperate and he needed food, I promised him I would not leave him, I would take care of him. Therefore, you emulate me.

When you are going to have or be the one to provide, when you’re going to have all the riches and you’re going to have this great feast and you’ll have this great food in Jerusalem, you share. You take care and you make sure not to forsake those who don’t have anything, just like I didn’t forsake Yaaqob when he didn’t have anything. You take care, make sure not to leave behind the Levite, the Levite doesn’t have any of the land. You take care of the Levite; you take care of the poor person; Yaaqob was a poor person on the run. Yaaqob had nothing. Yaaqob was like an orphan without a father when he went into Laban’s house. He was so desperate for a father to take him in. He was like — you take care of the orphan and the widow too because God took care of you that way.

You thought of this place, this special place as the gate of heaven. Well, you’re going to be — in the Yaaqob story I was the provider, God was the provider. You were in my gates, the gates of heaven and I took care of you. So when you’re the provider in the Land of Israel, I’m going to take care of you. So then you’re the provider, you’re going to have gates. Remember, there are poor people in your gates; there is a Levite in your gates. Make sure you take care of those people also.

# The Fifth Tool: Wives

# Leah, the wife for the firstborn

The Gemara teaches that the twin daughters of Laban were destined to marry the twin sons of Yitzchak.[[63]](#footnote-63) The older girl (Leah) for the older boy (Esav), and the younger girl (Rachel) for the younger boy (Yaaqob). This means that Yaaqob will need to marry Leah, the wife destined for Esav, if he is to perform Esav’s mission.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 28:1-5*** *And Yitzchak called Yaaqob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him: ‘Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. 2 Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother’s father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother’s brother. 3 And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a congregation of peoples; 4 and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land of thy sojournings, which God gave unto Abraham.’ 5 And Yitzchak sent away Yaaqob; and he went to Paddan-aram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Yaaqob’s and Esav’s mother.*

***Bereshit (Genesis) 29:25*** *And it came to pass in the morning that, behold, it was Leah; and he said to Laban: ‘What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?’*

The Torah tells us that Yaaqob worked seven years in order to marry Rachel - רָחֵל. However, when he awoke the next morning he discovered that he had slept with Leah - לֵאָה instead of Rachel.[[64]](#footnote-64) This presents a bit of a problem. Why didn’t Yaaqob immediately annul this marriage and demand the one who had been the object of his desire? Further, why did Leah consent to this deception? (The most obvious answer is that she did not want to marry Esav.[[65]](#footnote-65))

The Midrash tells us that, in the morning Yaaqob asks Leah why she, daughter of Laban the deceiver, has in turn deceived him? Leah responds that Yaaqob, in effect, had done the same thing when he took the blessing from Yitzchak that had been intended for Esav.[[66]](#footnote-66) Such a retort is inconsistent with Leah’s stellar character. She was obviously not trying to justify her own actions by pointing out a seemingly dishonest move of Yaaqob’s. Clearly Leah is conveying to Yaaqob that she understands that he has two missions from the fact that he had acquired the becorah. Leah was part of the mission requirement that went with the becorah. Since Yaaqob had taken on Esav’s mission, he needed Esav’s destined wife to become his wife.

From Yaaqob’s words it is plain that he accepted Leah and that he agreed to work seven more years for Rachel. Why did he do this?

The fact that Leah *does* go ahead and marry Yaaqob reflects the fact that she sees HaShem’s hand behind both Laban’s illogical actions and the unusual circumstances propelling her towards Yaaqob. Thus, in spite of Leah’s own misgivings as well as her understanding of the difficulty she might incur once Yaaqob discovers her, Leah chooses to be passive and proceed with her father’s plan. R’ Aharon Kotler[[67]](#footnote-67) observes that, “All of Laban’s machinations, however, could not have succeeded had not HaShem wanted them to, for it is illogical to believe that Yaaqob could not have detected something amiss until the morning…the marriage to Leah took place unimpeded because HaShem’s plan required that Yaaqob and Leah become husband and wife.” Evidently, Leah and Yaaqob were tuned into this reality. I suspect that when Yaaqob obtained the becorah and its associated bracha, that he was not too surprised when he acquired more than one wife, but I am getting ahead of myself.

The midrash[[68]](#footnote-68) tells us that Leah and Rachel were twins just as Esav and Yaaqob were twins. With twins you have a physical expression of the duality and synergy that defines their mission in this world. They need to stay together and work together for a common goal. As with Yaaqob and Esav, so too with Laban’s twins, Leah was called the elder and Rachel the younger, and like Yitzchak’s twins, so too Rachel and Leah were completely different in their character and way of life. A close look at the Torah text enables us to draw to different images of these two women: Rachel, active by nature and taking matters in hand, the other, domestic and passive. The women seem to have the opposite temperaments of their destined spouses. The opposite temperaments would normally attract and complement each other.

Yaaqob has acquired[[69]](#footnote-69) Leah, Esav’s destined wife. He now has one of Esav’s ‘tools’. His acquisition of Leah, however, was dependent on obtaining the becorah בְּכֹרָה- the birthright, which belonged to Esav.

# Rachel, the wife for the Physical Mission(Bilhah)

As we mentioned earlier, Rachel and Leah not only switched places in order to marry Yaaqob, but they also switched missions for all times. Rachel took on the mission of the material physical aspect instead of the spiritual role. We can see this manifest in her children: Yosef and Benjamin.

Yosef, with his coat of many colors, AKA Esav’s garment, took on the task of physically providing food for the whole world, including his own extended family.

The evil inclination pervaded Esav. This hate extended to Leah when she married Yaaqob and was switched to Rachel’s son Yosef. HaShem hated Esav,[[70]](#footnote-70) Esav hated Yaaqob.[[71]](#footnote-71) In the same way Leah was ‘hated’ by Yaaqob.[[72]](#footnote-72) In the end, Yosef was ‘hated’ by his brothers.[[73]](#footnote-73) Leah overcame this hatred, as did Yosef. This was their destiny! This was the task they were given to overcome evil.

Benjamin, whose land provided a place for HaMakom, the Temple, also provided a primary physical role.

According to the Zohar, Benjamin complemented his brother Yosef. ‘Rachel gave birth to two tzaddikim, Yosef and Benjamin. Yosef was a “higher tzaddik”, while his brother Benjamin was a “lower tzaddik”.[[74]](#footnote-74) What are these two types of saintly tzaddikim?

The “higher tzaddik” is a conduit for the shefa (the Divine influence), drawing it down from above, while the “lower tzaddik” passes the shefa to the physical world below. Benjamin’s role, as the “lower tzaddik”, was to imbue our world with holiness. His whole life, Benjamin was concerned that the Temple should be built in the portion of Eretz Israel that his tribe would inherit.[[75]](#footnote-75)

Benjamin’s progeny would become the first king of Israel, and a major force against Amalek.

# Bilhah - Rachel’s Handmaid

# Zilpah - Leah’s Handmaid

# The Sixth Tool: Children

|  |
| --- |
| **Bereshit (Genesis) 30-31 order****(birth** order**)** |
|  |
| 1. **Reuben** - Leah |
| 2. **Simeon** - Leah |
| 3. **Levi** - Leah |
| 4. **Judah** - Leah |
| 5. **Dan** - Bilhah |
| 6. **Naphtali** - Bilhah |
| 7. **Gad** - Zilpah |
| 8. **Asher** - Zilpah |
| 9**. Issachar** - Leah |
| 10. **Zebulon** - Leah |
| 11. **Joseph** - Rachel |
| 12. **Benyamin** - Rachel |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Mother** | **Meaning** | **Birth Date** | **Lifespan** | **Year of Death** |
| Reuven | Leah | *reu ben* - “See a son” | Kislev 14, 2193  | 125 | 2318 |
| Shimon | Leah | *shama* - “hear” | Tevet 28, 2194  | 120 | 2314 |
| Levi | Leah | *lavah* - “to be a companion” | Nisan 16, 2195  | 137 | 2332 |
| Yehudah | Leah | *yadah* - “thank” | Sivan 15, 2196  | 119 | 2315 |
| Dan | Bilhah | *dan* - “judge” | Elul 9, 2196  | 125 | 2321 |
| Naphtali | Bilhah | *naphtuley* - “twist” or “wrestle” | Tishrei 5, 2198  | 133 | 2331 |
| Gad | Zilpah | *gad* - “success” | Cheshvan 10, 2198  | 125 | 2323 |
| Asher | Zilpah | *asher* - “fortune” | Shevat 29, 2199  | 123 | 2322 |
| Yissachar | Leah | *sachar* - “reward” | Av 10, 2198 | 122 | 2320 |
| Zevulun | Leah | *zevul* - “permanent home” | Tishrei 7, 2200 | 114 | 2314 |
| Yosef | Rachel | *yosef* - “add” | Tammuz 1, 2199 | 110 | 2309 |
| Benyamin | Rachel | *ben yamin* - “son of my right hand“ | Cheshvan 11, 2208 | 109 | 2317 |

# The Seventh Tool: New Name: Israel[[76]](#footnote-76)

The final tool that Yaaqob acquires in the furtherance of his mission is a new name: Israel. These names will be used interchangeably throughout the Tanach depending on the intended audience and the intended mission: *Yaaqob* for the physical mastery and *Israel* for the spiritual mastery.

This new name is given to Yaaqob in two different places by two different entities. The first time it is given by the angel of Esav (AKA Yaaqob’s Yetzer HaRa - his evil inclination). This suggests that this was the final hurdle that Yaaqob needed to surmount:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 32:25*** *And Yaaqob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.*

Later God confirms this name change:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 35:9-10****And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him.* ***10****And God said unto him: 'Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name'; and He called his name Israel.*

The man/angel that Yaaqob wrestled with represents the yetzer hara - the evil inclination.[[77]](#footnote-77)

The Michtav Me’Eliyahu asks, was it merely coincidental that the malach’s turn to sing came on the morning that Yaaqob defeated him? He explains that song reflects perfection. When a being fulfils its purpose, then it is time to recite a song. The Satan wasn’t sent to destroy Yaaqob, rather he was sent to aid him. If one conquers his yetzer hara, then the Yetzer HaRa’s mission has been fulfilled. The angel of Esav came to impart this message to Yaaqob and his descendants. The main struggle with our Yetzer hara is over Torah study. HaShem gave Yaaqob the strength to defeat the angel to show us that if we remain steadfast we too can overcome him.

Rashi explains, ‘Our Rabbis explained that this was the prince (guardian angel) of Esav’. The angel that came was the Angel of Esav, who represented the Yetzer HaRa (evil inclination).[[78]](#footnote-78) [[79]](#footnote-79)

***Midrash Rabbah - Genesis 77:3*** *R. Hama b. R. Hanina said: It was the guardian Prince [angel] of Esav.[[80]](#footnote-80) To this Yaaqob alluded when he said to him [Esav]: Forasmuch as I have seen thy face, as one seeth the face of Elohim, and thou wast pleased with me (Gen. 34:10).[[81]](#footnote-81)*

According to our Sages, he is the “Angel of Esav”, and their struggle, which “raised dust up to the supernal throne”, is the cosmic struggle between two nations and two worlds – the spirituality of Israel and the materiality of Esav (Edom / Rome).

Late one night a nameless, enigmatic adversary meets a man named Yaaqob; at least, Yaaqob thought that was his name.

And he said to him, what is your name? And he said, Yaaqob. And he said, No longer will you be called Yaaqob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed.[[82]](#footnote-82)

While the identity of this individual is withheld, apparently his statement is accurate, for later God reaffirms the message:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 35:9-10*** *And God appeared to Yaaqob again, when he came from Padan-Aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, your name is Yaaqob; no longer shall you be called Yaaqob, but Israel shall be your name; and he called his name Israel.*

And God appeared to Yaaqob again, when he came from Padan-Aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, your name is Yaaqob; no longer shall you be called Yaaqob, but Israel shall be your name; and he called his name Israel.[[83]](#footnote-83)

While these pronouncements seem straightforward, things may not be as simple as they appear. Although other biblical figures also had name changes, after their new name was bestowed, the old name was never used again. But in the case of Yaaqob/Israel, the name change doesn’t seem to stick: Avraham was born Avram, but after God changed his name, he never again reverted to the previous form of Avram. One would assume that in similar fashion, from this point onward Yaaqob should never again be called Yaaqob, but that simply is not the case. God Himself, in subsequent dialogue, addresses him as Yaaqob rather than as Israel. Perhaps, then, we have not properly understood the “name change”.[[84]](#footnote-84)

When Avraham’s name is changed it is permanent, to the extent that using the old name is halachically proscribed.[[85]](#footnote-85) The Baalei HaTosefot[[86]](#footnote-86) explain that Avraham’s name changed as he underwent a metamorphosis. The new name was given at the juncture at which most Jewish males are given their name - when they are circumcised. Precisely because the new name was part of Avraham’s conversion, the old identity was forfeited. Yaaqob, unlike Avraham, was born “Jewish”, was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth and given his name concurrently. His new name must have a different purpose.[[87]](#footnote-87)

We must conclude that Yaaqob’s name was not changed; rather, he received an additional name.[[88]](#footnote-88)

Rashi[[89]](#footnote-89) suggests that the name Yaaqob indicates subservience, while the name Israel indicates strength and victory. Varying uses reflect different aspects of Yaaqob’s personality that come to light in varying situations. Another view is offered by Meshech Chachmah,[[90]](#footnote-90) who sees the different names as expressing the distinction between Yaaqob as an individual versus Israel as a national identity. Thus, according to Meshech Chachmah, God addresses “Israel” exclusively when, and only when, there are national issues at hand.[[91]](#footnote-91)

The Netziv[[92]](#footnote-92) [[93]](#footnote-93) proposes that the distinction is between a supernatural aspect (Israel), versus a more mundane name (Yaaqob) used when natural events or actions are described. Because humans cannot function purely on the spiritual plane, both names are needed.

The name Israel is given to Yaaqob as he is about to enter the Land of Israel, having built his family and his wealth, having brought to fruition the blessings meant for Esav. The name Israel is bestowed upon him when he has successfully incorporated into his personality the aspects Esav abandoned. The name Israel is bestowed upon him after his confrontation with and victory over Esav. He has taken on Esav’s attribute of Din, building Am Israel together with Leah, and this is reflected in his new name. But his previous identity, his natural attribute of Chesed, co-exists with Din; he has accepted a dual responsibility, and the duality of his name reflects this. He is married to both Rachel and Leah; he is both Chesed and Din, both Yaaqob and Israel.

Yaaqob was only confirmed at the spiritual heights encapsulated in the name Israel when he successfully fought Esav’s angel to a standstill and forced him to voluntarily surrender the blessings. The completion of the process of growth is marked by the official bestowing of the name Israel as explained by the Ari. The acquisition of the blessings only became final when Yaaqob demonstrated that they rightfully belonged to him through merit and were not accidentally in his possession due to artifice and trickery. Yaaqob demonstrated this merit by winning the battle with the angel.

But this battle did not take place until Rachel, who at first appeared barren, finally gave birth to a son, Joseph. It was only then that Yaaqob was ready to leave the house of his father-in-law, Laban, and face confrontation with Esav. It was not until then that he could fully actualize himself spiritually as Israel. It is no wonder that Yaaqob was afraid of the confrontation with Esav.

“Rescue me please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav, for I fear him lest he come and strike me down, mother and children. (Ibid., 32:12)

Until he was officially confirmed as Israel, the children of Leah, who had been born as the earthly expression of this spiritual level were at risk.

It is obvious that the ascent to the spiritual level named Israel had to proceed through the expansion of the level called Yaaqob. It was Rachel, Yaaqob’s female counterpart, who possessed the ability to give this spiritual level its earthly expression. Things can only grow if they are first expressed. If Rachel had remained childless there would have been no earthly expression of the spiritual Yaaqob, and Yaaqob could never have proceeded to become Israel. Until Rachel gave birth to Joseph the confrontation with Esav’s angel and the ability to be confirmed as Israel were both out of the question. The final spiritual form the Jewish people would adopt still hung in the balance.

Yaaqob vs. Israel

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Egypt** | **Haran** |
| Exodus 3:22 Israel plundered the Egyptians. | Genesis 31:1 Yaaqob plundered Lavan. |
| Exodus 5:1 God called Israel out of Egypt. | Genesis 31:22 Yaaqob traveled 3 days towards Israel. |
| Exodus 14:9 Egypt caught Israel on 7th day. | Genesis 31:23 Lavan caught Yaaqob on the 7th day. |
| Exodus 14:2 Egypt met Israel near the tower. | Genesis 31:49 Lavan met Yaaqob near the tower. |
| Exodus 15:3-4 God delivered Israel. | Genesis 31:53 God delivered Yaaqob. |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Stolen Bracha27:1-28:5** | **Life with Lavan29:1-31:54** | **Struggle with Angel32:4-32:33** |
| **Antagonist** | Esav | Lavan | Esav/Angel of Esav |
| **Who prompts Yaakov to act?** | Rivka | God | God |
| **How Yaakov handles the situation** | Tricks Yitzchak and then runs away | Runs away | Runs away (until the angel intervenes) |

# Rachamim[[94]](#footnote-94)

Yaaqob represents Rachamim רחמים,[[95]](#footnote-95) which is the merger of the Chesed of Avraham and the Din of Yitzchak.[[96]](#footnote-96) The Vilna Gaon explains that when Yaaqob is called Ish Tam[[97]](#footnote-97) - a simple or perhaps “perfect man” - this combination of the Chesed of Avraham and the Din of Yitzchak is the nature of his perfection. He is perfect because he is the center, the wonderful balance.[[98]](#footnote-98) But what is Rachamim? How is it distinguished from Chesed? The word Rachamim is etymologically related to rechem, womb. Thus, one might render Rachamim as all-embracing, unconditional love[[99]](#footnote-99) like that of a mother for her child. Just as a mother has this sort of love for her child despite the inevitable physical pain of childbirth and the unavoidable emotional pain of raising the child, so Rachamim is the combination of Din and Chesed. Few people experienced the pain of raising children as acutely as Yaaqob. Reuven’s indiscretion and insubordination, Shimon and Levy’s violent adventures, the abuse suffered by Dinah, Yosef’s disappearance and apparent death, the potential loss of Binyamin: the story of Yaaqob’s life was one of parental pain.[[100]](#footnote-100)

According to some commentaries,[[101]](#footnote-101) Rachamim is the synthesis[[102]](#footnote-102) of Chesed and Din,[[103]](#footnote-103) the synthesis of thesis and antithesis, of unlimited withholding and unlimited giving. This is the means Yaaqob used to cope with the unresolved conflicts in his life.

Another possibility is that instead of synthesis, the relationship may be more accurately described as symbiosis: the new entity (Rachamim) combines Din and Chesed, but each of the pre-existing elements retains its identity as a distinct attribute.[[104]](#footnote-104) This approach is akin to another description of Yaaqob: According to the Midrash, Yaaqob is associated with the main beam which goes through width of the Mishkan - the “bariach hatichon”.[[105]](#footnote-105) It was Yaaqob who brought this beam to Egypt when he went to see Yosef, effectively beginning the Exile.[[106]](#footnote-106) This is the middle beam which holds the edifice together. This is Yaaqob, who has the ability to bring together the attributes he has inherited from Avraham and Yitzchak, and hold these two divergent strands together to create the unshakable “middle way,” the supporting beam of what will later become our main conduit to spirituality. This is what it means to be the “middle,” to support the structure, to provide tools for Redemption at the very start of the inevitable Exile.

In fact, Yaaqob is the first individual in the Torah to use the word rachamim, often translated as compassion; really it is the balance between unlimited giving and unlimited withholding where one gives what is required, but nothing more:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 43:14*** *And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may free your other brother, and Binyamin. And if I am to be bereaved of my children, then I am bereaved.*

Each of the Patriarchs has a unique spiritual identity: Avraham is associated with Chesed (unlimited giving), Yitzchak is identified with Din (judgment, unlimited withholding). Yaaqob is known as Tiferet (beauty) or Rachamim (compassion). Our first question should be, why? Why is Yaaqob associated with Rachamim? Is this identification arbitrary, or is there an intrinsic relationship?

# Limiting the Exile

The Megaleh Amukot[[107]](#footnote-107) says that when Yaaqob prayed for rachamim, it was from God, and not from the Egyptian ruler: He prayed that God’s Attribute of Rachamim should temper the Din of the Exile. This prayer is the reason that the actual period of slavery lasted only 86 years, which is the numerical value of Elohim.[[108]](#footnote-108) This would be a classic example of Rachamim which fuses Chesed and Din: The children of Avraham are destined to be slaves, apparently for a period of 400 years. But tradition tells us that the 400 years are counted from the birth of Yitzchak and not from the moment the Children of Yaaqob begin their sojourn in Egypt.

FOR LO, THE WINTER IS PAST. This refers to the four hundred years which our ancestors were condemned to be in Egypt. THE RAIN IS OVER AND GONE: this refers to the two hundred and ten years [that they were actually there]. Are not ‘rain’ and ‘winter’ the same thing? R. Tanchuma said: The real hardship [of winter] is its rain. So, the real bondage of Israel in Egypt was eighty-six years, from the birth of Miriam.[[109]](#footnote-109)

The duration of the Exile was 210 years, but actual slavery was only for 86 of those years. According to Megaleh Amukot, this is a result of the prayers of Yaaqob, and reflects his unique spiritual profile:[[110]](#footnote-110) This is a merger of Chesed and Din. The Exile and enslavement are inevitable, unavoidable. Yaaqob prayed, not to cancel these harsh decrees, not to alter the judgment of Gods attribute of Din, but to merge it with God’s attribute of Chesed - 86 years of slavery in place of 400. Indeed, the Talmud teaches that the enslavement was tempered in another way: Yaaqob himself was spared slavery:

*R. Hiyya b. Abba said in R. Yohanan’s name: it was fitting for our father Yaaqob to go down into Egypt in iron chains, but his merit saved him, for it is written, I drew them with the cords of a man, with bands of love; and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat before them.*

Slavery should have begun with Yaaqob taken down to Egypt in chains, but he was spared the disgrace. Yaaqob arrived in Egypt with a royal escort and was received by Pharaoh himself with full honors. It was the beginning of the slavery, conducted with pomp and circumstance. This combination is Rachamim. The sale of Yosef[[111]](#footnote-111) and Yosef’s ascension to royalty were all part of the greater plan to temper the unavoidable enslavement.[[112]](#footnote-112)

Let us return to another unresolved conflict in Yaaqob’s life: Who is his “real” wife? According to the Zohar,[[113]](#footnote-113) the real wife of Yaaqob was Rachel, and the real wife of Israel was Leah. Therefore, the Megaleh Amukot says, as soon as Yaaqob returns to the Land of Israel and receives the name Israel, Rachel dies.[[114]](#footnote-114) It is as if Yaaqob is no more; therefore, his soul-mate, is no more. Rachel was the woman Yaaqob loved; Leah was the woman who produced the lion’s share of Am Israel. The Midrash articulates the issue as follows: The word ikar (‘principal’ wife) is related to akara (childless); when the Torah says Rachel was akara, the message is that she was the principal wife. Nonetheless, Leah is the mother of the nation.[[115]](#footnote-115)

The complexity of the issue stems from the nature of Rachamim. Avraham was identified with Chesed, and his wife Sarah, who insists that Ishmael must go, is Din. It is she who displays clear judgment, is able to isolate the black and the white from amidst the grey. Yitzchak, her son, is also identified with Din; he hears the pronouncement of God and unflinchingly executes the decree. There is no grey area. His wife Rivka is identified with Chesed, hence the test employed by Avraham’s servant to locate the proper spouse for Yitzchak.

Who is Yaaqob? A kindly, sensitive tent - dweller. A spiritual man. A man of loving-kindness whom one needs no other reason to love. Rachel, too, is kind, generous, giving. Her self-sacrifice for her sister is unparalleled in the annals of Chesed. Here, at last, is the perfect couple: Similar in temperament and inclination, without the stark differences that characterized the home life of the previous two generations. But something went wrong. A different couple, also destined to unite, never materialized, Esav and Leah.

Esav and Leah were meant to be together,[[116]](#footnote-116) but Esav turns his back on the Divine Plan. He abdicates. A replacement for the powerful Esav in the pantheon of Jewish leaders must be found. Enter Israel, the “replacement” spouse for Leah. The merger of Yaaqob and Israel is paralleled by the merger of Rachel and Leah. In fact, we are told that Rachel and Leah were one soul divided between two bodies.[[117]](#footnote-117)

The original plan was for Yaaqob and Rachel to form a home of complete Chesed and for Esav and Leah to form a home of total Din. With these forces joined and working in harmony, the product would become known as Am Israel. This plan is frustrated when Esav backs out. He scorns his birthright, rejects his responsibility. Esav’s powers of judgment are not put to use in the service of God, but rather in the service of self, as part of Esav’s rebellion. A void results, a vacuum that must be filled. Yaaqob steps up. He takes Esav’s birthright upon himself, acquires the blessing that was meant for Esav, and sets out to fulfill a dual role: to fulfill the destiny of Yaaqob and fulfill God’s Covenant with Avraham, while at the same time fulfilling the destiny which Esav has abandoned, which will now be filled by Israel.[[118]](#footnote-118)

Yaaqob must now leave the tents. He must reinvent himself. He must live a dual life, and he must marry two women. He must be both Yaaqob and Israel; he must become Rachamim.

# Reuben

God saw (ra’ah) Leah’s distress; He enabled her to become pregnant as consolation for her soul and she gave birth to a handsome and wise son. Leah said: “See the son (re’u ben) that God has given me” and she therefore called him Reuben.[[119]](#footnote-119) Another tradition has Leah saying: “See my son among the children. He is neither tall nor short, neither pale nor ukam [dark-complected?]”.[[120]](#footnote-120) In yet another tradition, Reuben’s name is connected with his future. Leah said: “Re’u ben (See [this] son), see the difference between my son and the son of my father-in-law (Esav son of Yitzchak). Esav knowingly sold his birthright; despite this he hated Yaaqob and sought to kill him. But my son Reuben’s birthright will be taken from him against his will, yet he will not be jealous of Joseph, but rather will save him from death when[[121]](#footnote-121) his brothers want to kill him”.[[122]](#footnote-122) According to this midrash, Reuben’s name expresses his mother’s joy at her son’s good qualities. In her statement we hear her satisfaction at having been married to Yaaqob rather than to Esav.

The dudaim allowed Leah to conceive Yissachar who formed a partnership with Zevulun and formed the partnership which Esav and Yaaqob should have become.

# Yissachar and Zevulun

The relationship between Yissachar and Zevulun whereby Zevulun deals in business and Yissachar in Torah is the picture of the relationship that Esav and Yaaqob were supposed to have. This relationship is spelled out in Moshe’s blessing:

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 33:18*** *Be joyful Zevulun in your going forth, and Yissachar in your tents.*

The Midrash provides further elaboration:

***Bamidbar Rabbah 13:17*** *Zevulun and Yissachar make their livelihoods together, and they receive their reward for Torah together.” Zevulun shares his income with Yissachar, and Yissachar shares his Torah with Zevulun.*

Rav Moshe Feinstein adds that the partnership is a 50-50 arrangement: Zevulun’s income is shared equally with Yissachar, and Yissachar’s Torah is shared equally with Zevulun. It is as though the two become one body, one part fulfilling the physical requirements and the other fulfilling the spiritual side. This is the relationship that Yaaqob and Israel took on.

The blessing that Yaaqob got that was intended for Esav:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 27:28*** *And may G-d give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness (riches) of the land and abundance of grain and wine.*

This blessing speaks entirely of the material world. When Yitzchak blesses Yaaqob before sending him away he says:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 28:3-4*** *May the Almighty bless you, make you fruitful and multiply you. May you become an assembly of peoples. May He give you the blessing of Abraham to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land of your dwelling which G-d gave to Abraham.*

This was the blessing always intended for Yaaqob. It was to inherit the world of spirituality. The original plan was more along the lines of the Yissachar-Zevulun partnership.

Yissachar would learn Torah and Zevulun would provide sustenance. Yaakov would learn, and Esav would provide income. Esav was supposed to inherit the material world in order to sustain Yaakov. Esav failed so Yaakov had to be blessed with both the material and spiritual worlds.

The Malbim notes that ideally Esav and Yaaqob could have formed a Yissachar-Zevulun type partnership.

The message for us is that we need Yissachar and Zevulun within Am Israel, we need a shevet Levi within Am Israel, and every person has to play his role. There are those who play the important role of focusing primarily on the spiritual needs of Am Israel, and there are those who play the important role of focusing on the material, physical needs of Am Israel. And as Rivka understood, both have to be working l’sheim shamayim, both have to be committed servant of HaShem, and both are part of Am Israel.

This is similar to the relationship between the rest of Am Israel and shevet Levi. The Rambam describes that the tribe of Levi was supported by the rest of Am Israel so that they would be free to focus solely on spiritual pursuits.

Leah bears Yissachar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina.

|  |
| --- |
| **Rachamim** |
| **Am Israel** |
| **Yaaqob** | **Esav** |
| Rachel | Leah |
| **Yaaqob** | **Israel** |
| Chesed | Din |
| Subservience, embodied in the name Yaaqob from ‘akev, heel) | Representing the superior, national, even supernatural identity |
| Spiritual mission | Physical mission |
| Torah  | Science |
| Yaaqob was meant to do the avodat hapnim, the inner spiritual work. | Esav was meant to do the avodat hachutz, to take the fruits of the field and elevate them for HaShem. |
| The cultivation of good. | The conquest of evil (because Esav was naturally inclined toward idolatry). |
| Eitz HaChaim, the concept of “do good”. | Eitz HaDaat, the concept of “move away from evil”. |
|  |  |

# Antoninus and Rebbi

Perhaps Esav’s most famous spiritual descendants were the Romans, who dominated most of the known world for centuries. They emulated Esav’s approach to the physical and spiritual in their outlook and actions. The merging of the Yaaqob and the Esav missions is exemplified by Antoninus, the Roman representing Esav, and Rebbi, the Jew representing Yaaqob.

Antoninus and Rebbi somehow shared a trait that was held in common by their two nations, despite the animosity and tension between them that characterized millennia of their interaction. Because they lived at the same time and interacted with each other – like Yaaqob and Esav – the sense of self-worth and importance that they shared was more pronounced and apparent than it was at other times. The close association between Rebbi and Antoninus was analogous to the relationship in utero between Yaaqob and Esav. Rivka was shown that the two nations that would descend from her would share one important trait.

Rebbi and Antoninus insisted on the presence of certain menu items at their table, regardless of the season. Out-of-season lettuce and radishes were served not because the hosts were gluttonous, or because they wished to flaunt their power and stature. These food items of distinction bore testimony to a self-image of proud importance. For all their differences, the progeny of Yaaqob and Esav alike would conduct their lives in a manner appropriate to people of stature.

When Rebbi was about to leave this world, he proclaimed that he had not materially benefited from this world in all his days.[[123]](#footnote-123) The rishonim ask how this could be? Do we not here learn that his table was stocked with dainties? Our approach resolves the problem. Rebbi surrounded himself with fine things, including fine food. Yet, his intention in all of this was to publicly affirm the importance of his office as Nasi, the titular head of his people. When lavish meals were offered up on his dining room table, Rebbi did not participate to satisfy his desire for nourishment. He took part to proclaim the importance of Man.

He could indeed say that, for all the lavishness of his lifestyle, he never took any delight in any of it in the usual manner. He lived the way he did to underscore the specialness of human beings.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Identical Twins Boys** | **Yaaqob’s Esav Mission** | **Yaaqob’s Primary Mission** |
| **Birth Order** | Esav was the elder. | Yaaqob was younger. |
| **Birthright (becorah)** | Purchased with lentils from Esav. Esav was the first born. | Conceived from first drop of semen. Heel grabber. |
| **World** | Olam HaZeh | Olam HaBa |
| **Wife - Twin Sisters** | Leah - Elder | Rachel - Younger |
| **Wives Switched Roles** | Rachel - Younger | Leah[[124]](#footnote-124) - Elder |
| **Mission** | Physical | Spiritual |
| **Attribute**To become Rachamim. **Bereshit (Genesis) 43:14** | Geburah | Chessed |
| **Blessing** | **Bereshit (Genesis) 27:28-29** And may G־d give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness (riches) of the land and abundance of grain and wine. 29 Let peoples serve thee, and nations bow down to thee. Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother’s sons bow down to thee. Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be every one that blesseth thee. | **Bereshit (Genesis) 28:3-4** God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a congregation of peoples; 4 and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land of thy sojournings, which God gave unto Abraham. |
| **Temperament**Bereshit (Genesis) 25:27 | Hunter | Tent Dweller |
| **HaShem’s view** | Esav Hated | Yaaqob Loved |
| **Sphere** | Science | Torah |
| **Tree** | Eitz HaDaat, the concept of “move away from evil”. | Eitz HaChaim, the concept of “do good”. |
| **Yaaqob’s Names** | **Yaaqob** (Esav) | **Israel** (Edom) |
| **Body Part** | Esav’s Hands | Yaaqob’s Voice |
| **Battle** | Use his Geburah to conquer his yetzer HaRa - his evil inclination. | Yaaqob battles the Angel of Esav and prevails. |
| **Honor Parents** | Esav honored his father. | Yaaqob honored his mother and father. |
| **Mashiach** | Mashiach ben Yosef | Mashiach ben David |

# Angels on the Way

Two other Torah incidents that shed light on the ladder incident.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Angels on the Ladder** | **Angels in Machanayim** |
| **Father blesses him** | Gen. 28:1 Yitzchak blesses | Gen. 32:1 Laban blesses |
| **Yaaqob on the road** | Gen. 27:44 Fleeing Esav | Gen. 31:17-18 Fleeing Laban |
| **Leaving his father’s house** | Gen. 28:5 Yitzchak’s house | Gen. 31:18 Laban’s house |
| **Direction of travel** | Gen. 28:10 Going to Haran | Gen. 31:13 Going to Canaan |
| **Vayifga - ויפגע** | Gnen. 28:11 וַיִּפְגַּע  (And he lighted upon) | Gen. 32:2 וַיִּפְגְּעוּ (met him) |
| **Angels** | Gen. 28:12 In his sleep (indirect) | Gen. 32:2 While awake (direct) |
| **Naming the place** | Gen. 28:19 Beit El | Gen. 32:3 Machanayim |

# The Tower of Babel vs. the Ladder[[125]](#footnote-125)

Another incident that comes to elucidate the incident of Yaaqob and the ladder was the incident at Babel shortly after the flood of Noach’s day. The most striking parallel between the narratives is the similar expressions used to describe the tower and the stairway. The tower had “its top in the heavens”,[[126]](#footnote-126) and the stairway’s “top reached the heavens”.[[127]](#footnote-127) These are the only two biblical stories that use the metaphor of reaching the sky as a way of describing something very high, thus inviting comparison between the two.

Both narratives begin with journeying that pauses at a certain spot. Despite the similarity, the way in which they pause differs. The tower builders stopped of their own initiative because they found a suitable valley in which to settle, whereas Yaaqob stopped because he had no other option, “for the sun had set”.[[128]](#footnote-128) Scripture emphasizes that Yaaqob had been unaware of the importance of the place at which he set down to rest: “Surely the Lord is present in this place, **and I did not know it!”**.**[[129]](#footnote-129)** Sanctification of place in the narrative of Yaaqob’s stairway was not dependent on a human being. The Lord revealed the nature of the place to Yaaqob by means of the stairway vision, and Yaaqob was surprised by the revelation. In contrast, the place where the tower would be built was chosen by human beings.

Both stories mention the construction material used and the process of building. In both there is a powerful desire to remain connected with a specific place and a fear of leaving it. The people who built the tower tried to prevent being dispersed over the face of the earth and aspired to remain united, dwelling in the valley they came upon in the land of Shinar. Yaaqob also had misgivings about departing from the land of Canaan, as we learn from the vow he makes at the end of the story.

In both stories the bond with the place is related to building a structure. The generation of the tower of Babel built a city and tower out of fear that they “be scattered all over the world”,[[130]](#footnote-130) and the tower was supposed to serve as a unifying focal point around which they would all dwell. Yaaqob, about to leave his land, vowed that if he returns safe and sound he would build a house to the Lord at the place where he erected the pillar; thus the pillar is connected with Yaaqob returning to his land. Just as the people who built the tower viewed their structure as a center of attraction, so too Yaaqob set up a pillar to mark the place to which he would return.

Aside from these structures, both stories also mention the city in which the structure was situated. Building the tower was part of a broader plan of city construction. Indeed, the end of the story mentions the name of the city and the origin of that name: “That is why it was called Babel, because there HaShem confounded[[131]](#footnote-131) the speech of the whole earth; and from there HaShem scattered them over the face of the whole earth”.[[132]](#footnote-132) Likewise, the story of Yaaqob’s dream concerns not only the stairway and the pillar, but also the name of the city where he received his revelation and the origin of that name: “He named that site Beth-El [= house of G- d], but previously the name of the city had been Luz”.[[133]](#footnote-133) The story of the tower provides an interpretation of the etymology of the name Babel, and the story of Yaaqob’s dream explains the origin of the name Beth-El. The numerous parallels between the stories, both in language and content, strengthen the argument for a literary connection between the two.

At Babel the focus was on Idolatry, whereas the focus at Yaaqob’s ladder was on the service of HaShem.

***Sanhedrin 109a*** *R. Jeremiah b. Eleazar said: They split up into three parties. One said, ‘Let us ascend and dwell there; ’ the second, ‘Let us ascend and serve idols; ’ and the third said, ‘Let us ascend and wage war [with God]. ’...It has been taught. R. Nathan said: They were all bent on idolatry.*

vs.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 28:18*** *And Yaaqob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.*

The tower builders desired to make a ‘name’ for themselves, in the place *they* chose, and to practice idolatry in the place that they designated as the center of the world and the cradle of civilization.[[134]](#footnote-134) They desired to make bricks, which are all uniform rather that employing the diversity of rocks. To put it another way, they wanted everybody to be similar to bricks rather that to be unique like rocks. The end result of this sinful behavior was the confusion of language, the loss of unity, and the dispersion throughout the world. Their desire to remain in one place was opposed to God’s command the they multiply and fill the earth.[[135]](#footnote-135)

Yaaqob, on the other hand, was interested in recognizing HaShem’s hand and bringing His name into the world.[[136]](#footnote-136) Yaaqob sought to worship HaShem alone and unify all peoples around HaShem and His house, the Temple, the place *HaShem* chose. The idea of tithing is primarily to unify God’s people in the center of the world - Jerusalem and the Temple. The laws of tithing teach that God’s people will be spread out because HaShem has enlarged them. Despite this, they are to regather in Jerusalem during each of the three pilgrimage festivals: Passover, Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

Indeed, a closer look at the narratives reveals several other parallels (To demonstrate the links these two incidents we will use Rabbi Ishmael’s[[137]](#footnote-137) hermeneutic rules[[138]](#footnote-138) of: *Gezerah shavah[[139]](#footnote-139)* and *Davar halameid mei ’inyano* v *’davar halameid misofo*.[[140]](#footnote-140)):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Bereshit 28 Ladder** | **Bereshit 11 Babel** |
| **Head in the Heavens** | 28:12 וְרֹאשׁוֹ, מַגִּיעַ הַשָּׁמָיְמָה The top of it reached to heaven. | 11:4 וְרֹאשׁוֹ בַשָּׁמַיִם with its top in heaven |
| **Seed shall be scattered**“Vayafetz,” the pei and tzaddi of “vayafetz” gets mirrored in the “u’faratzta,” to burst forth of Yaaqob’s ladder.[[141]](#footnote-141) | 28:14 וְהָיָה זַרְעֲךָ כַּעֲפַר הָאָרֶץ, וּפָרַצְתָּ יָמָּה וָקֵדְמָה וְצָפֹנָה וָנֶגְבָּה And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. | 11:8 וַיָּפֶץ יְהוָה אֹתָם מִשָּׁם, עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth |
| **Place is Named** | 28:19 וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-שֵׁם-הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא, בֵּית-אֵל And he called the name of that place Beth-el28:17 שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמָיִם gate of heavenSo that notion of gates of heaven and House of God is now being mimicked, perhaps, or foreshadowed in Bavel, which might just mean bava El, the gates of God. | 11:9 עַל-כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ, בָּבֶל Therefore was the name of it called Babel Someone had suggested that linguistically Bavel actually seems to be a playoff of an Aramaic conjugation and in Aramaic — it actually might be short for bava El. *Bava* actually in Aramaic means the gate of and El, of course, means God which actually means something fascinating. You would think that’s crazy, which is that Beit El, the name of the place in the ladder actually means exactly the same thing as the name of the place of the tower. Which is Bavel and Beit El actually just mean the same thing in two different but related languages; Aramaic — or Hebrew-Aramaic rather and Hebrew. So Bavel which, of course, has become Babylonian later on becomes the seat of Aramaic. So you have a Babylonian- esque name, Bavel, the gates of heaven and Beit El.  |
| **Traveling From / To the East** | 29:1 אַרְצָה בְנֵי-קֶדֶם land of the children of the east. | 11:2 בְּנָסְעָם מִקֶּדֶם they journeyed east |
| **‘There’** | 28:11 וַיָּלֶן שָׁם and tarried there all night | 11:2 וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם and they dwelt there |
| **Order**“Vayimtzi’u,” of course, you have the Vav-Yud-Tzaddi- Aleph in “vayimtzi’u” in that exact order, Vav-Yud- Tzaddi-Aleph is vayeitzei, “Vayeitzei Yaakov m’Be’er Shava.” | 28:10  וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב, מִבְּאֵר שָׁבַע And Yaaqob went out from Beer-sheba | 11:2 וַיִּמְצְאוּ בִקְעָה they found a plain |
| **Stones vs. Bricks** | 28:11 וַיִּקַּח מֵאַבְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם and he took one of the stones of the place | 11:3 הָבָה נִלְבְּנָה לְבֵנִים Come, let us make brick |
| **A Tenth** | 28:22 I will surely give the tenth unto Thee | 11:10-27 (The next ten generations ending in Abraham who gave a tenth to Melchizedek.) |
| **Names - Focus** | 28:19 **Beit El** - ‘House of God’.28:17 this is the *gate of heaven.* | 11:9 **Babel** - The Babylonians called their city Babel, from the Akkadian babilim, “the *gate of the god.”* |

What are we to learn from the parallels between these two incidents? I’d like to suggest that the main takeaway is that HaShem desires unity when we are united around Him. The perfect result of Yaaqob’s ladder is found in:

***Zephaniah 3:9-10*** *For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language. that they may all call upon the name of HaShem, to serve Him with one consent. 10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia shall they bring My suppliants, even the daughter of My dispersed, as Mine offering.*

The Prophet Zephaniah speak of a time when Babel will be reversed. The languages will become as they were before Babel, and the people will be gathered rather that scattered.

This prophecy is the antidote to the Tower of Babel, which represents the arrogance and idolatry that led to people speaking many languages. In those communities where the triennial cycle was / is used for Torah readings, this passage in Zephaniah fittingly was selected as the Ashlamata[[142]](#footnote-142) for the reading of the Tower of Babel.

# Laban, Babel, and Egyptian Slavery

There were three Torah events which are related to the life of Yaaqob. In other words, Yaaqob’s life portends for his descendants. If we look carefully at the life of Yaaqob we can understand later events and how we should relate to them.

Yaaqob went into exile to Haran and was enslaved by Laban, his father-in-law. This event was mirrored nearly four-hundred years later when his descendants went into exile in Egypt where they were enslaved. In this section of our study, we will examine these events and compare and contrast them. Let’s begin by examining Yaaqob’s story.

# Yaaqob’s Enslavement

Lebenah הלבנה = Bricks. Laban has the connotation of white hot bricks. Laban, of course, was also Yaaqob’s father-in-law. Laban enslaved Yaaqob for at least seven years.

When Yaaqob left Laban to return to Canaan, one of the first places that he stopped was Succoth.

*Bereshit (Genesis) 33:16-17* So Esav returned that day on his way unto Seir. And Yaaqob journeyed to Succoth. and built him a house, and made booths for his cattle. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

Yaaqob’s first stop in Canaan after leaving the slavery of Laban is mirrored in the Bne Israel when they left Egypt. On their first stop they also stayed at a place called Succoth.

Shemot (Exodus) 12:37 *And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. about six hundred thousand men on foot, beside children.*

However, when Yaaqob stayed *at* Succoth he stayed *in* a house. He stayed in this house when he had an abundance of wives, children, servants, animals, and food.

# Babel

Babel[[143]](#footnote-143) was the place they made Lebenah סקיכןה = Bricks.

# Egyptian Slavery

The only other place where they made bricks (סבלנים) was in the Egypt slavery.[[144]](#footnote-144) The Egyptian exile mirrors Yaaqob’s exile and slavery in Haran.

When the Bne Israel left Egypt, on Nisan 15 after being freed from slavery, their first stop was at a place called Succoth.

***Shemot (Exodus) 12:37*** *And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, beside children.*

This mirrored the experience of Yaaqob who stayed at Succoth for his first stop in Canaan after he left the slavery of Laban. However, where Yaaqob stayed in a *house* while his animals stayed in *succoth,* the Bne Israel stayed in *succoth,* not *houses*!

For the first time in 430 years the Bne Israel did not have houses for sleeping that first night.

Shemot (Exodus) 12:40 *Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years.*

As if sleeping in cattle succoth was not bad enough, that first night they had only matza to eat, they had only the bread of affliction to eat.

***Shemot (Exodus) 12:39*** *And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual.*

Consider this odd situation: For the first time in 430 years the Bne Israel are free. Their first night of freedom is spent in cattle huts and eating the bread of affliction. This was their first night of freedom! As if that were not odd enough, consider that this is Nisan 16 - Passover. We are eating matza as expected, bur we are sleeping in succoth?? The holiday of Succoth will not be celebrated until Tishri 15, six moths later! Why are we sleeping in succoth on Passover?

It seems that Passover celebrates *what we ate,* while Succoth celebrates *where we slept.*

Passover, Nisan 15-22, is just before the beginning the barley harvest. On Nisan 16 we begin to harvest the barley. *On Passover we are at the end of winter when are food supplies are at their lowest.*

Succoth, Tishri 15-23, is at the end of the harvest season. Most of our crops have been harvested and stored in our barns. *On Succoth we are at the end of summer when our food supplies are at their most abundant.*

Because these two festivals are at the opposite ends of the calendar, they both call us to recreate our exodus from Egypt when we followed HaShem into the wilderness. On Passover we eat and show that despite the meagerness of food, we still trusted HaShem and followed Him. On Succoth, when we have an abundance of food, we leave our comfortable homes and live in a succah, just like we did when we left Egypt. On Succoth we remember the faith of the shadow of the succah when we trusted HaShem wholeheartedly; and we do this when we have plenty of food.

***Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) 2:3*** *Go, and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying: Thus saith HaShem: I remember for thee the affection of thy youth, the love of thine espousals; how thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.*

# Observations

***Bereshit (Genesis) 32:25*** *Yaaqob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn.*

The man/angel that Yaaqob wrestled with represents the yetzer hara - the evil inclination.[[145]](#footnote-145)

The Michtav Me'Eliyahu asks, was it merely coincidental that the malach's turn to sing came on the morning that Yaaqob defeated him? He explains that song reflects perfection. When a being fulfils its purpose, then it is time to recite a song. The Satan wasn't sent to destroy Yaaqob, rather he was sent to aid him. If one conquers his yetzer hara, then the yetzer hara's mission has been fulfilled. The angel of Esav came to impart this message to Yaaqob and his descendants. The main struggle with our Yetzer hara is over Torah study. HaShem gave Yaaqob the strength to defeat the angel to show us that if we remain steadfast we too can overcome him.

# Later History[[146]](#footnote-146)

Eventually, when the Jews leave Egypt and approach Mount Sinai, they are accosted by Amalek, the descendants of Esav, who are unhappy with the change in fortunes and destinies.[[147]](#footnote-147) Their military attack on the Children of Israel would have made Esav proud. But things have changed: Yehoshua[[148]](#footnote-148) is sent to fight back with a sword. The children of Yaaqob literally fight fire with fire, taking up arms in a manner more similar with Esav than with Yaaqob. And while this scene unfolds on the battlefield, up on the mountain Moshe prays for victory. But it is how he prays that is striking. He lifts his hands in prayer. "And it came to pass, when Moshe held up his hands, Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hands, Amalek prevailed." (Shemot 17:11) When the voice and the hands are completely united, Esav/Amalek can be defeated.[[149]](#footnote-149) Only then can the Jews can continue to Mount Sinai.28 Only then will they "see the sounds" of the greatest Revelation mankind has ever known. Once they have elevated their hands, the sounds, too, can be elevated.

# Conclusion

Every Jew, without difference, has been given, from birth, while he is still on the level of “Yaaqob” and at the beginning of service, a mission from HaShem. That mission is to take “Esav’s heel”, the worldly, mundane matters; and make them “the inheritance of Yaaqob”,[[150]](#footnote-150) to convert them to sanctity and thereby to make the world a dwelling place for HaShem.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 25:27*** *And the boys grew; and trapping was in Esav’s mouth, a man of the field; and Yaaqob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents.*

What does the Torah mean when it says “trapping” was in Esav’s mouth? Rashi explains that Esav knew how to trap with his mouth, to deceive. He asked his father how to tithe salt (tofel - minor)[[151]](#footnote-151) and straw (tofel - minor), things which don’t require tithing. His father assumed from these questions that he was very pious.

Why did Esav choose to ask his question about salt and straw? Surely there were many other ways he could have paraded his “piety.” Why specifically did he choose salt and straw?

All things are not created equal. Some things are of the essence, others are subordinate. Every palace has an entrance hall. No one would confuse the importance of the entrance hall with the palace itself. The palace is the essence. The entrance hall has importance only because it is the only way into the palace.

Similarly, this world is not the be-all-and-end-all of existence. This world is merely an entrance hall to a great palace of light - the world to come. The world to come is the essence. *This* world is subordinate to it. This world derives its importance only from the fact that it is the only access to the world to come. By itself, it has no value.

In the realm of time, Shabbat is the essence. The six days of the week derive their importance because they lead to Shabbat. By themselves they are insignificant.

The spiritual is of the essence. The physical is subordinate to it. The physical is only significant to the extent that it provides a stage on which Man may grow in spiritual stature. This suggests that the neshama is essential where the guf, the body is just a vehicle for the neshama. To put it another way, Yaaqob is the neshama and Esav was to be the guf.

Yaaqob represents the spiritual. Esav, the physical. The relationship between Yaaqob and Esav was supposed to be that of essence (ikor) and subordinate (tofel). As long as Yaaqob remains pre-eminent, the world can reach its fruition, and Esav himself, while being the incarnation of the physical, can also achieve spirituality by supporting Yaaqob. Esav, however, wasn’t satisfied with his role. He wanted to be the star of the show. He wanted to be the essence of Creation.

Esav betrayed his true intentions, to star in Creation, when he asked his father how one tithes salt and straw. Salt has no intrinsic value. It finds its value as a condiment to other food. It is always subordinate. Straw, too, is subordinate to wheat. It is the vessel which carries the wheat, its support, its method of existence. But it is not the *essence*. The wheat is the essence. The Jewish People - Yaaqob - are the “wheat of the world.” The nations of the world are the “straw” - the means by which the Jewish People can fulfill their spiritual mission.

In the mind of Esav, however, straw and salt were of the essence. Thus, he could ask his father how to tithe them. Esav’s question betrayed his true intentions. Esav was trying to overturn the Divine order of Creation. Esav was trying to turn the bath water into the baby.

We can learn two important lessons from all of the above. First of all, this story gives us insight regarding what our perspective should be towards the non-Jewish world. We respect them, do not ignore them, recognize that they have a role in the world, are cautious in our dealings with them, and await the time when they will also recognize our G-d and the truth. Even more importantly, we learn more about ourselves and our mission. Yes, we must be spiritual people. However, we must also involve ourselves with the material world. We learn from Yaaqob how careful we must be not to go too far when pursuing the latter. There must be balance. We must make certain that our physical dealings serve to enhance our spiritual side rather than detracting from it. If we strive to find this balance and take the necessary safeguards, we will be emulating our ancestor, Yaaqob, who served as our father in both the spiritual and physical realms.

“Maaseh avot siman lebanim,” - the lives of the forefathers foreshadow events in the lives of their descendants.

If the layman (Esav) is left in charge, the danger is ever present that the provider of material benefits will come to regard the material survival of the Jewish people as the top priority. He would allocate the bulk of the communal effort to the attainment of the Jewish people’s material success and place the importance of such success above that of the levels of spiritual accomplishment. He would place the emphases of communal Jewish effort on the conquest and settlement of the land of Israel or on winning the battle against anti-Semitism. Such a misguided allocation of effort would rapidly lead to the decline of the Jewish people in all areas, including the material.

Yitzchak realized that the deception could not have succeeded had he been unequivocally in the right. The fact that HaShem remained neutral indicated that Rivka’s position also had merit. As the rationale behind his position was based on the attainment of maximum spiritual success whereas Rivka’s position was based on the necessity of avoiding spiritual disaster, he gave her his after-the- fact consent. With Yitzchak’s agreement, the course of Jewish history was set. The men of affairs, the empire builders, would always play a minor role in decision-making throughout Jewish history. The Torah scholar (Israel) always ran the show.

In fact, the role of the scholar lies at the very heart of the genius of Jewish survival. Jews never committed the error of measuring their national strength in terms of material might. National well- being was always equated with the general level of Torah knowledge. The commitment to such knowledge measures the Jewish will to survive. Without the spiritual message that is contained in the Torah, Jews have no real *raison d’etre.*

But the combination of spiritual potentials within a single individual had a curious side effect. While in the state of separation Yaaqob was obviously the more spiritual brother, after the potential of Esav was added to his own, the situation became reversed. The Jewish people are referred to as Yaaqob when they are in a lowered spiritual state. Whenever they surpass themselves and reach a spiritual pinnacle they are called Israel. Israel is Yaaqob plus Esav, and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It was Leah, the female counterpart of Israel, who gave birth to the progenitors of Jewish royalty (Judah), priesthood (Levi), and scholarship (Issachar). But the combination of spiritual potentials within a single individual had a curious side effect. While in the state of separation Yaaqob was obviously the more spiritual brother, after the potential of Esav was added to his own, the situation became reversed. The Jewish people are referred to as Yaaqob when they are in a lowered spiritual state. Whenever they surpass themselves and reach a spiritual pinnacle they are called Israel. Israel is Yaaqob plus Esav, and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It was Leah, the female counterpart of Israel, who gave birth to the progenitors of Jewish royalty (Judah), priesthood (Levi), and scholarship (Issachar).

**\* \* \***

This study was written by

Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben David (Greg Killian).

Comments may be submitted to:

Rabbi Dr. Greg Killian

12210 Luckey Summit

San Antonio, TX 78252

Internet address: gkilli@aol.com

Web page: <https://www.betemunah.org/>

(360) 918-2905

Return to The [WATCHMAN](https://www.betemunah.org/) home page

Send comments to Greg Killian at his email address: gkilli@aol.com

1. Hapnim = interior [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bereshit (Genesis) 28:12 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hachutz = exterior [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The *Malbim* sheds some light on the mindset of Yitzchak and Rivka. He explains that when HaShem created the world the *best and most efficient way* was for man to perfect himself spiritually to the point where he would be a fitting resting place for the Shechinah in this world. Understandably, this is not possible for everyone to achieve, nor is it practical, as it requires a complete devotion to HaShem and a separation from worldly pursuits, as necessary as they may be. To this end, HaShem chose one nation for this holy mission and all the other nations would fill the physical needs of that chosen nation. Even within that nation, not everyone will be cut out for the task; rather one group will be separated for this purpose. This refers to the tribe of Levi within all of Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Menachem Mendel Schneerson (April 18, 1902 OS - June 12, 1994 / AM 11 Nissan 5662 - 3 Tammuz 5754), known to many as the Lubavitcher Rebbe or simply as the Rebbe, was a Russian Empire-born American Orthodox Jewish rabbi, and the last Rebbe of the Lubavitcher Hasidic dynasty. He is considered one of the most influential Jewish leaders of the 20th century. Menachem Mendel Schneerson (April 18, 1902 OS - June 12, 1994 / AM 11 Nissan 5662 - 3 Tammuz 5754), known to many as the Lubavitcher Rebbe or simply as the Rebbe, was a Russian Empire-born American Orthodox Jewish rabbi, and the last Rebbe of the Lubavitcher Hasidic dynasty. He is considered one of the most influential Jewish leaders of the 20th century. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (15 April 1847 - 11 January 1905), also known by the title of his main work, the Sfas Ernes (Ashkenazic Pronunciation) or Sefat Emet שפת אמת (Modem Hebrew), was a Hasidic rabbi who succeeded his grandfather, Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter, as the Av beit din (head of the rabbinical court) and Rav of Gora Kalwaria, Poland (known in Yiddish as the town of Ger), and succeeded Rabbi Chanokh Heynekh HaKohen Levin of Aleksander as Rebbe of the Gerrer Hasidim. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. mesirat nefesh (מסירת נפש, “giving over the soul”) - self-sacrifice. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. After twenty years of marriage without children, Yitzchak’s prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. HaShem reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the world-wide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins - Rome and Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Tov = beneficial. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Eitz HaDaat = The Tree of Knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Eitz HaChaim = The Tree of Life. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Rabbi Gedalyahu Schorr (27 November 1910-7 July 1979), also known as Gedalia Schorr, was a prominent rabbi and rosh yeshiva. He was regarded as the “first American Gadol” (Torah giant), an expression coined by Rabbi Aharon Kotler. Indeed, Rabbi Meir Shapiro, the famed rosh yeshiva of Chachmei Lublin, remarked that Rabbi Schorr had the most brilliant mind he ever encountered in America, and one of the most brilliant in the entire world. He said this when Rabbi Schorr was only nineteen years old. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Lubavitcher Rebbe [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The serpent in Gan Eden tempted Chava by telling her to listen to her own animal type desire for the physical, rather than her higher desire to serve HaShem. We see this in Chava’s thoughts about how the fruit ‘looked’ and what it would ‘taste’ like. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Bereshit (Genesis) 25:29-34 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Bereshit (Genesis) 27:14-15 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Bereshit (Genesis) 27:25-29 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Yonatan b. Uziel; PdRE 2,* Rashi on Genesis 27:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Bereshit (Genesis) 29:22 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Bereshit (Genesis) 32:33 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The Haggada [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Throughout Sefer Bereshit there is great degree of significance associated with names. A name is not merely a way to call someone but, rather, it encapsulates the essence of the individual. Both Avraham and Yaaqob received names at birth, yet their names were changed later in life as certain events unfolded. Chazal in Berachot 13a, draw a distinction between the change in the name of “Avram” to “Avraham” and the change of “Yaaqob” to “Israel”. Once Avraham received his new name no one was permitted to refer to him by his previous name “Avram”, whereas Yaaqob is constantly referred to as both “Yaaqob” and “Israel”. Avraham received a new mission, to be “av hamon goyim”, a father to many nations, and as such, his previous title, “Av leAram”, the father of his own home, is inappropriate. From this we learn that Yaaqob’s new mission did not supplant his old mission. Rather, he received a new mission in addition to his old mission. Two missions needed two names: Yaaqob and Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Zohar Bereshit Page 74a [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Bereshit (Genesis) 3:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Bereshit (Genesis) 3:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Yafeh Toar p.386 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Zohar [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Bereshit(Genesis) 27:15 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Zohar Chadash, Shir HaShirim; Zohar, VaYechi, VaYakhel [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Or HaAphelah* on *The garment of many colours* (Gen 37:3): the only other place the word כתונת (translated here “garment”) is used: Yosef’s כתונת כסים (coat of many colours/long sleeves). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Bereshit Rabba 65:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Caesarea and Jerusalem: If someone will tell you, “Both are destroyed, ” do not believe it. If someone will tell you, “Both are settled, " do not believe it. But if they tell you, “Caesarea is destroyed and Jerusalem is settled, ” or “Jerusalem is destroyed and Caesarea is settled”—you may believe it. *(Talmud, Megillah 6a)* [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Gittin 57b [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The pshat is the literal understanding. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Bereshit (Genesis) 27:28-29 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky (August 8, 1911 - August 8, 2000) served as Slonimer Rebbe from 1981 until his death. He is widely known for his teachings which he published as a series of books entitled Netivot Shalom. Rabbi Berezovsky was a prolific writer. Through his writings he was among the most influential of contemporary Chasidic rebbes, among Chasidim and non- Chasidim alike. A leading non-Chasidic rosh yeshiva has referred to the Netivot Shalom as the “Mesillat Yesharim of our times”. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. This section is based on lectures given by Rabbi David Fohrman. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Bereshit (Genesis) 29:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Bereshit (Genesis) 30:15 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Tehillim (Psalms) 126:5 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Bereshit (Genesis) 27:12 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. ibid. 28 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Bereshit (Genesis) 29:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Bereshit (Genesis) 29:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. He drew away his seed (his children) from Haran and went home (to Eretz Israel). Cur. ed. differ considerably here. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. I.e. with a large family. By a play on words אלומותיו is connected with עלם ‘a youth’. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. This section was given in a shiur by Rabbi David Fohrman. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Bereshit (Genesis) 25:22 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Bereshit (Genesis) 27:20 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Bereshit (Genesis) 25:25 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Bereshit (Genesis( 27:36 [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Bereshit (Genesis) 25:26 [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Bereshit (Genesis) 27:34 [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. This section is based on a shiur given by Rabbi David Fohrman. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Debarim (Deuteronomy) 14:22-29 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Bereshit (Genesis) 28:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. The Torah does not tell us which place. — Instead it uses the definite article במקום, [which is equivalent to המקום?] in the place, implying that the identity of the place was so well known that it need not be specified. This indicates that it refers to the site referred to elsewhere by the designation the place: Mt. Moriah, of which it is said [22:4]: he saw the place [המקום] from afar (Rashi).

Rashi's comment, as explained by his commentators, is based on several factors:

There is a rule that 'the Torah does not come to conceal but to explain' [i.e., a Scriptural passage is intended not to be obscure but to instruct (see Rashi to 10-25 and 21:34)]. Accordingly, a reference to a place emphasized by the definite article the' must refer to some previously specified place (Tzeidah laDerech).

It cannot refer to any place other than Mt. Moriah since the Torah itself refers to that holy site as מקום, place, in several places [22:4; and as Ralbag notes, the future Temple site on Mt. Moriah is also obliquely refer- red to in the Torah as the 'place' HASHEM shall select (Deut. 16:16 and frequently).] Accordingly, by its reference to place here, the allusion to Moriah is clear (Mizrachi).

It is an application of the hermeneutic rule of gezerah shavah [i.e., the use of a common expression with regard to two different subjects can be taken to imply that a rule which is mentioned with regard to one of the subjects should be applied to the other one as well],

Moriah was — by virtue of the Akeida — the only site sacred enough for such a divine revelation; it was the supreme place' par-excellence (Be'er Mayim Chaim).

Place names generally refer either to something about the owner or to a characteristic of the place. Because the prime significance of Mt. Moriah would not become known until the future when it would be the site of the Temple, it was called simply the place,’ as if to imply that it was as yet unknown (Kli Yakar). The traditional rabbinic interpretation that the place was Mount Moriah would seem to conflict with the simple sense of the narrative which would seem to imply that the place was Luz-Bethel. A reconciliation is offered by Rashi in v. 17 (Or HaChaim). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha (Hebrew: רבי ישמעאל בן אלישע), often known as Rabbi Yishmael and sometimes given the title "Ba'al HaBaraita" (Hebrew: בעל הברייתא), was a rabbi of the 1st and 2nd centuries (third generation of tannaim). He had a reputation for greatness in aggadah.[Mo'ed Katan 28b] Yishmael laid the foundation for the halakhic midrash on Exodus, the Mekhilta; and a considerable portion of the similar midrash, the Sifre on Numbers, appears also to have originated with him or in his school, known as "Debei R. Ishmael". [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. To consistently carry out his views in this direction, Rabbi Ishmael formalized a set of thirteen hermeneutic rules by which halakha was derived from the Torah. As a basis for these rules he took the seven rules of Hillel, and on them built up his own system, which he elaborated and strengthened by illustrating them with examples taken from the Scriptures. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Gezerah Shavah = *From a similarity of words.* From the second rule of Rabbi Ishmael and the second rule of Hillel. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. *A matter derived from its context, or a matter derived from its end* (i.e. from what follows it). From the twelfth rule of Rabbi Ishmael. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Bava Batra 123a [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. According to an ancient tradition, Rachel and Leah were twins: - *Seder Olam Rabbah* 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Ibid. 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Bereshit (Genesis) 27:27 [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Rav Aharon Kotler (1891–1962) was an Orthodox Jewish rabbi and a prominent leader of Orthodox Judaism in Lithuania, and later the United States, where he founded Beth Midrash Govoha in Lakewood Township, New Jersey. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Seder Olam Rabbah 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Kinyan, an acquisition. The kinyan kiddushin *does not effect a one-way acquisition, but rather a unification of husband and wife, a blending of identity. Kinyan* in the context of *kiddushin* does not involve the husband’s acquisition of the wife’s physical being. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Malachi 1:3 [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Bereshit (Genesis) 27:41 [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Bereshit (Genesis) 29:31 [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Bereshit (Genesis) 37:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Vayeitzei 153b [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. The Temple was partially located on a strip of land that extends from Judah’s portion into Benjamin’s portion. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Israel, *Yisrael* in the Hebrew, means “he who prevails over the divine”. *Israel* (ישראל) is a fusion of *Yashar El* (ישר-אל), literally “straight to God”. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Yetzer HaRa AKA Satan [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. according to ArtScroll the Malak of Esav is Satan, the Michtav m’Eliyahu states that the Malak that represented Esav was in fact the Yetzer hara. Midrash Tanchuma (Vayishlach 8) states it was Samael (see also the Kli Yakar). B.B. 16a states that the malach hamavet, Yetzer Hara and Satan are one. Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer seems to state it was a representative of Yaaqob or like The Beit HaLevi seems to state it was the Yetzer Hara within Yaaqob. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Sapphire from the Land of Israel: A New Light on the Weekly Torah Portion, by Rabbi Abraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Both nations and individuals were thought to have patron angels presiding over their destiny and protecting them: v. Sanh. (Sonc. ed.), p. 629, n. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. By Elohim the Midrash understands ‘angel’-Yaaqob said to Esav: ‘ I see in you the angel with whom I strove.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Bereshit (Genesis) 32:28-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Bereshit (Genesis) 35:9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. This observation is made by the Ktav V’Kabbalah, Bereishit 35:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. See Talmud Bavli Brachot 13a: Whoever calls Avraham Avram transgresses a positive precept, since it says, Thy name shall be Avraham. R. Eliezer says: He transgresses a negative command, since it says, Neither shall thy name any more be called Avram. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. The Tosafot (Hebrew: תוספות‬) are medieval commentaries on the Talmud. They take the form of critical and explanatory glosses, printed, in almost all Talmud editions, on the outer margin and opposite Rashi's notes. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Commentary of Baalei Tosafot Bereshit 35:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Ibn Ezra Bereishit 35:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Rashi Bereishit 35:10, this idea is echoed by Rabbenu Bachya 32:29. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843–1926) was a rabbi and prominent leader of Orthodox Judaism in Eastern Europe in the early 20th century. He was a kohen, and is therefore often referred to as Meir Simcha ha-Kohen ("Meir Simcha the Kohen"). He is known for his writings on Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, which he titled Ohr Samayach, as well as his novella on the Torah, titled Meshech Chachmah. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Meshech Chachmah Bereshit 35:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Ha’amek Davar Bereishit 35:10, see Rabbenu Bachya 47:29 who see Yaaqob as a name indicating physicality, and Israel as a name indicative of the spiritual. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (1816 in Mir, Russia – August 10, 1893 in Warsaw, Poland), also known as Reb Hirsch Leib Berlin, and commonly known by the acronym Netziv, was an Orthodox rabbi, dean of the Volozhin Yeshiva and author of several works of rabbinic literature in Lithuania. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. RACHEL AND LEAH by Rabbi Ari Kahn - http://www.aish.com/tp/i/moha/48955486.html [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. *Rachamim* comes from the Hebrew word *Rechem,* meaning womb. It is the boundaryless love of a mother for her child, a love that stems from the deep knowledge that the child is both of her and not of her. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. See the comments of the Alshich to Shemot 17:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Bereshit (Genesis) 25:27 [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. See commentary of the Vilna Gaon to the Sifra Deztneuta chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. For more on Rachamim and love see Maharal, Netzach Israel chapter 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. See Talmud Bavli Shabbat 89b, where God acknowledges the pain that Yaaqob endured raising his children. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. See Meshech Chachmah, Bereishit 35:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. See comments of the Megaleh Amukot Vayechi: When Yaaqob is buried in the Cave of the Machpelah, he resolves the stalemate between chesed and din. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. See comments of Sefer Mavo L’chochmat Hakabbala, Shaar Gimel Chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Rabbi Soloveitchik felt that in many instances Judaism has unresolved conflicts, and the desired resolution is not synthesis, which would dull both of the initial elements, but rather in the unresolved dialectic the beauty emerges. Thus, Adam is “created” twice: once as an individual, and once as a part of society. Both aspects are true expressions of self, and neither should be lost in the merger. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. See Shekel Hakodesh (Rav Moshe DeLeon). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. See Midrash Tanchuma (Buber Edition) Parshat Terumah section 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Megaleh Amukot is a 1637 work by Rabbi Nathan Nata Spira who lived in Poland (1585–1633). [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Elo-him = 86 aleph - 1, lamed - 30, heh - 5, yud - 10, mem - 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. “Miriam”, means bitterness. Midrash Rabbah Shir HaShirim 2:28 [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Megaleh Amukot Parshat Vaera. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Midrash Tehillim Psalm 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. See Sefer Etz Daat Tov parshat Vayigash. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Zohar Devarim 281b. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Megale Amukot parshat Vayechi, the name change of Yaaqob to Israel is recorded in chapter 35 verse 10, the death of Rachel follows immediately 35:17-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. See Midrash Rabba Bereishit 71:2: R. Judah b. R. Simon and R. Hanan said in the name of R. Samuel b. R. Isaac: When the Patriarch Yaaqob saw how Leah deceived him by pretending to be her sister, he determined to divorce her. But as soon as the Holy One, blessed be He, visited her with children he exclaimed, ‘Shall I divorce the mother of these children! ‘Eventually he gave thanks for her, as it says, And Israel bowed down [in thanksgiving] for the bed’s head (Gen. 47:31): Who was the head of our father Yaaqob’s bed? Surely Leah. BUT RACHEL WAS AKARAH - E.V. BARREN (29:31). R. Isaac said: Rachel was the chief of the house (the main wife), as it says, BUT RACHEL WAS AKARAH, which means, she was the chief (ikar) of the house. R. Abba b. Kahana said: The majority of those who dined [at Yaaqob’s table] were Leah’s children, therefore Rachel was declared the principal. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. See Rashi Bereishit 29:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Shaarei Leshem, Chelek Bet Siman Bet Chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. See Shem Mishmuel Vayetze 5679. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, [ed. Higger], chap. 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Midrash ha-Gadol, Yayeze 29 [ed. Margaliot, p. 524] [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Bereshit (Genesis) 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Berachot 7b [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Kethuboth 104B [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Rabbi E.E. Dessler, in *Michtav M'Eliyahu,* vol. 2, p. 211 [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. This section is based on a series of shiurim given by Rabbi David Fohrman and a paper by Tzvi Shimon, titled: Yaaqob's Ladder: Beth-El, Not Bab-El. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Bereshit (Genesis) 11:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Bereshit (Genesis) 28:12 [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Bereshit (Genesis) 28:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Bereshit (Genesis) 28:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Bereshit (Genesis) 11:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Heb. *balal* [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Bereshit (Genesis) 11:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Bereshit (Genesis) 28:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Bereshit (Genesis) 11:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Bereshit (Genesis) 1:28; 9:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Bereshit (Genesis) 28:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha (Hebrew: רבי ישמעאל בן אלישע), often known as Rabbi Yishmael and sometimes given the title "Ba’al HaBaraita" (Hebrew: בעל הברייתא), was a rabbi of the 1st and 2nd centuries (third generation of tannaim). He had a reputation for greatness in aggadah.[Mo'ed Katan 28b] Yishmael laid the foundation for the halakhic midrash on Exodus, the Mekhilta; and a considerable portion of the similar midrash, the Sifre on Numbers, appears also to have originated with him or in his school, known as "Debei R. Ishmael". [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. To consistently carry out his views in this direction, Rabbi Ishmael formalized a set of thirteen hermeneutic rules by which halakha was derived from the Torah. As a basis for these rules he took the seven rules of Hillel, and on them built up his own system, which he elaborated and strengthened by illustrating them with examples taken from the Scriptures. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Gezerah Shavah = *From a similarity of words.* From the second rule of Rabbi Ishmael and the second rule of Hillel. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. *A matter derived from its context, or a matter derived from its end* (i.e. from what follows it). From the twelfth rule of Rabbi Ishmael. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. We have two stories that are intertextually connected by the language that seems to mirror each other. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. See listing of the triennial Haftarot at the end of Yosef Ofer, “The Sections of the Prophets and Writings” (Hebrew), Tarbiz 58 (1989), pp. 155-189. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Bereshit (Genesis) 11:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Shemot (Exodus) 5:7-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Yetzer HaRa AKA Satan [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Rabbi Ari Kahn [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. When Esav came to stop the burial of Yaaqob we are told he came from Horeb - Sinai. Apparently, Hevron was not the only inheritance Esav wanted. He dreamed of the Torah from Sinai as well. See Pirkei D’Rebbi Eliezer chapter 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Yehoshua is a man of the tent. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. This idea can be found in the Mabit Beit Elokim Shaar Tefilla chapter 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Debarim (Deuteronomy) 33:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Ikor is the essential. So, food is ikor and the salt merely brings out the flavor of the food. Straw is tofel and the wheat is ikor. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)