

The parsha begins with Yaakov coming back to daven Maariv where his father and grandfather davened before proceeding to go to Choron, and he sleeps there. Chazal tell us that before he leaves to Lovon's house to find a wife, he spends 14 years in Yeshivas Shem and Ever – never formally going to sleep. This shows us how one prepares to find a shidduch.

This is going to be a very difficult task. Until now, Yaakov has been living in a very sheltered, secluded environment. Now he is going to live among thieves and charlatans and he has to find a wife, raise a family and come back with his integrity and honesty intact. How are you going to do that? By learning Torah.

When you enter a world where everything in this world is the opposite of who you are and what you are about and what you have been trained to be, you have to build a strong Torah foundation. This requires spending a serious amount of time immersed in an intense, isolated Torah environment. This is what Yaakov did. He spent 14 years there – it wasn't enough to sit and learn in Yitzchok's house. He had to seclude himself in the extreme to a place that is pure Torah.

Then he davens and places some of the stones of the place around him, and in the morning, they were one stone. They merged while he was sleeping. How many stones did Yaakov start out with? One opinion in the midrash says there were two, another says there were three, and yet another says there were twelve. Let us begin with the opinion who says there were two. Yaakov said that one stone symbolized Avrohom Ovinu. He did not merit to be the founder of Klal Yisroel, because he had Yishmoel and the Bnei Keturoh as well as Yitzchok. The second stone represented Yitzchok, who also didn't merit to found Klal Yisroel because he had Eisov. Yaakov says, if in the morning, these two stones become one, it will be a sign that I will merit to form Klal Yisroel.

The Ramban explains that when Yaakov Ovinu was told to go down to Egypt, he came to Be'er Sheva and encamped there. This was a very critical point in his life. The Ovov had a mesorah that Klal Yisroel would be started by someone who would father twelve shevotim. There are twelve different darkei avodoh of Hashem, and all those paths have to be unified in one man, and then expressed by his twelve children. When Yaakov Ovinu thought that he had lost Yosef Hatzaddik, he not only had lost his ben zekunim, he had lost his ability to be the one to found Klal Yisroel. When the brothers come back to Yaakov with the report that Yosef was still alive and Yosef sends the message that he remained the same Yosef Hatzaddik, Yaakov is rejuvenated. He comes back to life because now he is reassured that he has twelve sons who will be the twelve shevotim of Klal Yisroel.

Yaakov comes to Be'er Sheva and what you would have seen there before it was built up, is that there is an oasis, which is all green, up to a certain point. This is the city limit. Then there is a line of green, after which everything instantly becomes complete desert. It remains a desert all the way to Egypt. This is what Yaakov sees when he arrives in Be'er Sheva, and it symbolizes to him that this may be a one-way trip. Yaakov builds a mizbe'ach and offers korbonos.

But the posuk says he offers these korbonos "יִצְחָק אָבִיו יִצְחָק". Why 'Yitzchok' and not 'Avrohom'? Rashi says it is because the obligation of kibbud to one's father is greater than to one's grandfather. The Ramban explains that Avrohom was unlimited chessed and Yitzchok was unlimited avodoh and din. Yaakov said, if I can take the middas hachessed of Avrohom and the middas hadin of Yitzchok and combine

them in the correct proportions, then I can achieve the shleimus necessary to raise the twelve shevotim.

The opinion that says Yaakov took twelve stones and had them merge, was to symbolize that Yaakov could successfully encompass all the twelve different darkei avodoh within himself and then merit to raise Klal Yisroel. This is Yaakov's dream and his single-minded goal. He prepares himself to go into Lovon's house. How does he prepare? By sitting and learning.

In this dream, he sees a ladder. Hashem is telling Yaakov that he will be successful in perfecting himself to the level of raising twelve shevotim if he continues on this path. But don't think the future will be smooth and rosy. There will be a troubled history for Klal Yisroel. Malochim who represent the four goluyos who will subjugate and persecute Klal Yisroel, go up the ladder and quickly come down – except for the last one, Edom. Chazal identify golus Edom and Christianity. This maloch goes up and up and up, and seemingly never comes down! Hashem reassures Yaakov that eventually Edom will be brought down as well.

Hashem promises Yaakov that his offspring will increase and prosper like the dirt of the earth. How does earth grow and prosper? With water. Chazal say this alludes to Torah:

וְהָיָה זֶרְעֶךָ כְּעֶפֶר - מִה עֶפֶר הָאָרֶץ אֵינוֹ מִתְבָּרֵךְ אֲלֵא בַמַּיִם, כִּי בְנֵיךָ אֵין מִתְבָּרְכִין אֲלֵא בְזָכוֹת הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁנִּמְשָׁלָה כְּמַיִם

With what merit will Klal Yisroel survive the golus and even grow and prosper? Not because of all the Jewish billionaires we have. Where do they get their zechus from? The zechus of Torah – and nothing else. Klal Yisroel only flourishes to the degree that there is a flourishing of limud haTorah.

This midrash continues:

וְמִה עֶפֶר הָאָרֶץ מִבְּלָה אֵת כָּל כְּלֵי מִתְכּוֹת וְהוּא קַיָּם לְעוֹלָם, כִּי בְנֵיךָ מִבְּלִין אֵת כָּל הָעוֹלָם וְהֵם קַיָּמִים לְעוֹלָם

וְמִה עֶפֶר עֲשׂוֹי דַּיֵּשׁ לְכָל, כִּי בְנֵיךָ עֲשׂוּיִם דַּיֵּשׁ, הַדָּא הוּא דְכָתִיב וְשָׁמַרְתִּיהָ כִּי־דַ מוֹגִיף, מִהוּ מוֹגִיף אֲלֵין דְּמִיגִין מִחֵתִיךְ [נִסַּח אַחַר: מִכֵּתִיךְ] וְיִסְרִין אוֹתָךְ וּמִתִּישִׁין אֵת כְּהָךְ.

All the other nations reach their climax in history and then go into permanent decline and eventual extinction. Klal Yisroel always exists. But just as we endure like earth and we can outlive all other nations that erode like metal, we are trampled upon by everyone like dirt. Chazal are telling us that our history will not be a pleasant one. It will be filled with difficulties and challenges. In the haggodoh we say that Eisov gets his inheritance right away and settles on Har Seir easily without any long, drawn-out process. Klal Yisroel doesn't get Eretz Yisroel right away. They have to first go down to Egypt for a few generations, then they have to come out, and then they travel in the desert for 40 years. We have to struggle for every inch. We have nisayon after nisayon. We are the center of the universe, but it is not a free gift. We have to deserve it. And the only way to keep surviving, to overcome those difficulties, and to emerge intact with all the blessings we have, is through limud Torah.

Hashem tells Yaakov he will be the conduit of blessing for all the nations of the world. It is a historical fact that everywhere the Jews were allowed to settle and make positive contributions, the host country became rich and powerful as a result. Spain was a dominant power in Europe until the Jews were expelled by the Inquisition. The famous

Spanish Armada was defeated by the British in 1511 – which was right after the Spanish expulsion in 1492.

Hashem promises that He will be with Yaakov and protect him on his journey.

Yaakov wakes up from his dream and asks Hashem for assurances for the promises He made in the dream. He asks just to survive with the basic necessities and remain spiritually intact within this hostile environment he is going to. Yaakov spent 14 years trying to prepare for this ordeal, but there are no guarantees. He has to daven and plead with Hashem to protect him from all nisyonos. After Yaakov has done the maximum, then he can have bitachon that Hashem will give him spiritual success.

There is a very important Ramban in the beginning of his work on Emunoh and Bitachon. He brings the posuk which says there is bitachon in Hashem to help a person survive and be successful in his spiritual nisyonos, but only after he does maximum effort in his ruchniyus and understands deeply that only Hashem will determine the outcome.

Yaakov adds that he only wants enough material goods to survive. And he says, when the brochos of wealth from Yitzchok will eventually be fulfilled, then I will give ma'aser from all of it to You. Why is that critical to promise at this point? The answer is simple. How does a person demonstrate that he sincerely believes in Hashem? Yaakov Ovinu became massively wealthy because of his scrupulous honesty. How does a person show that he doesn't feel it is his own money, but only on loan from Hashem? By giving it away to tzedokoh. Why do we say tzedokoh is one of the keys to deep teshuvoh? By putting your money where your mouth is – Don't just say it. Show that you really believe all you have is a gift from Hashem – by not hoarding it all for yourself and giving a tenth of it back to Hashem.

Yaakov knows very well that he needs to achieve a very high level of spiritual perfection if he is going to merit to found Klal Yisroel. This nation is going to last through all human history! He first secludes himself in a yeshiva for 14 years. He is still thinking about the last Tosfos he learned in yeshiva when he finally goes to sleep for the first time in years. But before he sleeps, he davens the first Maariv – and then has this dream. Chazal tell us that out of his thinking in Torah, Yaakov gets this incredible vision that arranges all these elements of his future unfolding before him. Hashem tells Yaakov that he will be zoche to put all the middos of the Ovos together and will be protected. But the secret of the success of Klal Yisroel in its historical totality is the zechus

of limud haTorah.

People are amazed about the advanced technological prowess of the State of Israel – “the start-up capital of the world”, etc. How did it become so successful? Only because there are so many people learning Torah here in Israel. People don't want to recognize it. Klal Yisroel have blessed all the host countries that they are able to spiritually thrive in. Hashem is telling Yaakov that limud haTorah is the source of success throughout history. And the final stage – where Eisov falls and Moshiach is waiting in the wings – the thing that brings the final geuloh is limud HaTorah.

We are living in very interesting times. Throughout my entire lifetime I have never seen stranger times like the one we are living in. Everything is crumbling around us. All the institutions and bedrocks of society are shifting and tumbling. It is the people learning Torah – here and in the next beis midrash – who are the ones guaranteeing that Klal Yisroel will survive it all. As we know from Nefesh HaChaim, Hashem responds to our level of ruchniyus. We can plan and make all those pledges to grow and improve, but it has to translate into action.

In the end, Yaakov is successful and comes back to Eretz Canaan a very wealthy man. Eisov thought he would be the dominant one, and his brother would be a dependent, gullible nebach with no way to stand for himself in the material world. And he is in complete shock when he sees all the wealth that Yaakov is coming back with from Lovon's house. There are different ways you can succeed in the world. Yaakov shows us you can succeed with Torah, with honesty, with bitachon, and that can make you the greatest success. This is Yaakov's story. His children are compared to earth and water. We will only be blessed through the merit of Torah. Jewish history won't be an easy ride. But at the end, Klal Yisroel will emerge victorious. But we have to understand the tremendous value of limud haTorah.

Going to yeshiva to learn isn't an extra thing to do on the side. If you knew how much it is contributing to your success in this world and the next, you would never leave the beis midrash. Hashem has blessed our generation with this, and given us such an easy ability to sit and learn on a massive scale. It hasn't been like this for centuries! Why is this being given to us in particular? Because Edom is going down, Christianity is on the decline, and the only way to allow Moshiach to bring the geuloh is through large-scale limud haTorah. This is the opportunity our generation has been given – that we haven't had in centuries – and we better not waste it.