

# The Infinite Value of the Individual

Themes of *Sefer Bereshis*

Through the Commentary of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch

ALIT 2021 • Sarah Lipman

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## Yaakov & His Sons

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The complete *Commentary* of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (2002 Edition) was translated by Daniel Haberman and published by Feldheim Publishers with Judaica Press.

<https://www.feldheim.com/authors/hirsch-rabbi-samson-raphael/the-hirsch-chumash-complete-set.html>

The 1963 edition of the Commentary was translated by Isaac Levy and published by Judaica Press.

The source sheets are *Sheimos* and should be treated with the same respect as a *chumash*.

- 28** <sup>1</sup> *Yitzhak then called Ya'akov and blessed him. He commanded him, saying to him: You shall not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Besu'el, your mother's father, and take yourself from there a wife of the daughters of Lavan, your mother's brother.*
- <sup>3</sup> *And may the All-sufficing God bless you and make you fruitful and numerous, so that you become a community of peoples.*

כח א וַיִּקְרָא יִצְחָק אֶל-יַעֲקֹב וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ וַיְצַוְהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֹא-תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת פְּנִינִי:

ב קוּם לֵךְ פָּדָן אַרָם בֵּיתָהּ בְּתוּאֵל אָבִי אִמְךָ וְקַח-לָךְ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת לָבָן אֶתִי אִמְךָ:

ג וַיֹּאֵל שְׂדֵי יִבְרַךְ אֹתְךָ וַיְפְרֶךְ וַיִּרְבֶּךָ וְהָיִיתָ לְקַהֲל עַמִּים:

daughters-in-law. מבנות הארץ, from among the daughters of the land, of which God has said: (above, 15:16). לא שלם עון האמרי עד הנה

CHAPTER 28

- <sup>1</sup> וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ, this time deliberately and fully aware. Rivkah's medicine had completely opened his eyes.
- <sup>2</sup> In your mother's birthplace, where she was brought up properly in spite of Lavan's influence — there it will be possible for you, too, to find the right wife.
- <sup>3</sup> You need take nothing with you. God will accompany you on your journey; He will bless you, i.e., give you the means to establish a household, and He will give you the strength to beget children and to raise them in your own spirit, so that you reproduce yourself through them (see Commentary above, 1:28). And you will succeed in that which I did not: You will have עמים, children diverse in character, roots of future tribes endowed with diverse characteristics, and yet they all will form a קהל, one united community, in which there will be no פסול (see *Bereshis Rabbah* 68:13).

4 And may He grant you the blessing of Avraham, to you and to your seed with you, that you may inherit the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Avraham.

ד ויִתְּנוּ-לָךְ אֶת-בְּרִכַּת אַבְרָהָם לָךְ  
וְלְזַרְעֶךָ אִתְּךָ לְרִשְׁתָּהּ אֶת-אֶרֶץ  
מִגְרִיֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר-נָתַן אֱלֹהִים  
לְאַבְרָהָם: שְׁבִיעִי

5 And so Yitzchak sent Ya'akov away, and he went to Padan Aram, to Lavan, the son of Besu'el the Arami, the brother of Rivkah, the mother of Ya'akov and Esav.

ה וַיִּשְׁלַח יִצְחָק אֶת-יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּלֶךְ  
פְּדַנְנָה אֶרֶם אֶל-לָבָן בֶּן-בְּתוּאֵל  
הָאֲרָמִי אֶחִי רִבְקָה אִם יַעֲקֹב  
וַיַּעֲשֶׂוּ:

6 When Esav saw that Yitzchak had blessed Ya'akov and had sent him to Padan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him, he commanded him, saying, You shall not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan,

ו וַיֵּרָא עֵשָׂו כִּי-בֵרַךְ יִצְחָק אֶת-  
יַעֲקֹב וַשְׁלַח אֹתוֹ פְּדַנְנָה אֶרֶם  
לְקַחַת-לוֹ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה בְּבָרְכוֹ  
אֹתוֹ וַיֹּצֵו עָלָיו לֵאמֹר לֹא-תִקַּח  
אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת בְּנֵי-עֵין: מִפְּטִיר

7 And that Ya'akov obeyed his father and his mother and went to Padan Aram,

ז וַיִּשְׁמַע יַעֲקֹב אֶל-אָבִיו וְאֶל-אִמּוֹ  
וַיֵּלֶךְ פְּדַנְנָה אֶרֶם:

4-9 **ולזרעך אתך.** A unified kernel of a future nation will develop from your seed; not just from זרעך אחריו (cf. above, 17:7-10), from your later descendants, but from זרעך אתך. None of your children will be estranged from you. All of them will inherit with you and through you the blessing of Avraham.

If we compare this blessing — which was given with full awareness to Ya'akov — with the blessing that was intended for Esav (above, 27:28-29), which contains not a trace of the mission of Avraham, our interpretation of that blessing is corroborated.

But what seals everything is the statement: “When Esav saw that Yitzchak had blessed Ya'akov and had sent him to Padan Aram, to take

	The Mission (Free-willed moral development)	How the Mission is Fulfilled (Avodah)	Sphere of Activity (Bracha)	Tree	Leaving Home RSRH Commentary on Bereshis 28:3-4	Coming Home Bereshis 35:11-12	Self
1	<b>וכבשה</b> and exercise control over it	Acquisition and transformation of property	Earth	Fruits	<p>“ויתן לך...ולזרעך אתך לרשתך את ארץ מגריך” And may He grant... to you and to your seed with you, that you may inherit the land...</p>	<p>“ואת הארץ...לך אתתנה” “And the land... I will give to you...”</p>	גוף Body
2	<b>ומלאו את הארץ</b> and fill the earth	Extending blessing to others	Society	Branches	<p>“והיית לקהל עמים” so that you become a community of peoples</p>	<p>“גוי וקהל גוים יהיה ממך” “A nation and a community of nations shall come into being from you”</p>	רגש Emotions
3	<b>ורבו</b> and multiply	Forming and Educating Children	Home	Trunk	<p>“וירבך” and make you numerous</p>	<p>“ורבה” “and multiply”</p>	ראש-שכל Head
4	<b>פרו</b> Be fruitful	Development of self	Marriage	Rootstalk	<p>“...ויפרך” May...God...make you fruitful</p>	<p>“...פרה” “Be fruitful”</p>	נשמה Soul

## ***Bereshis 11:26-30 • Translation from Hirsch Chumash, Feldheim-Judaica***

...(26) Terach lived 70 years; then he begot Avram, Nachor, and Haran.

(27) These are the descendants of Terach: Terach begot Avram, Nahor, and Haran, and Haran begot Lot.

**(28) Haran died before the countenance of Terach, his father, in the land of his birth, in Ur Kasdim.**

(29) Avram and Nachor took themselves wives. The name of Avram's wife was Sarai; the name of Nachor's wife was Milkah, daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Yiskah.

(30) Sarai was barren — she had no children.

וַיְחִי־תֵרַח שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד אֶת־אַבְרָם (כו)  
אֶת־נְחֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן:

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת תֵּרַח תֵּרַח הוֹלִיד אֶת־אַבְרָם (כז)  
אֶת־נְחֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן וְהָרָן הוֹלִיד אֶת־לוֹט:

וַיָּמָת הָרָן עַל־פְּנֵי תֵרַח אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ (כח)  
מִלְּדָתוֹ בְּאוּר כַּשְׁדִּים:

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם וְנְחֹר לָהֶם נָשִׁים שָׁם (כט)  
אֶשְׁת־אַבְרָם שָׂרַי וְשֵׁם אֶשְׁת־נְחֹר מִלְכָּה  
בִּת־הָרָן אֲבִי־מִלְכָּה וְאֲבִי יִסְכָּה:

וַתְּהִי שָׂרַי עֲקָרָה אֵין לָהּ וָלָד: (ל)

## What does it mean to be a “bearer of the light of recognition of God”?

- Awareness of God’s Presence in my life — evidenced in my internal thoughts, feelings. = I bear Light within me.
- Awareness of God’s Presence in my life — evidenced in my speech and actions/choices. = Others can see that I carry Light within me; I shine Light beyond myself.
- God’s Providence (השגחה) is evident when you look at us — we are a living miracle. A people born from barren parents, a society that serves Hashem, a nation born from slavery, a land that bears fruit only for righteousness.

11 He encountered the place and stayed there overnight, because the sun had set; he took some of the stones of the place, arranged them around his head, and lay down to sleep in that place.

יא וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיִּלֵּן שָׁם בַּיַּרְבֵּה  
הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם  
וַיִּשֶׂם מִרְאֲשׁוֹתָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּמָּקוֹם  
הַהוּא:

foremost in the home. **Herein lies the difference** between the spirit of Judaism and non-Jewish culture.

Thus Ya'akov left Be'er Sheva and set out for Charan. Be'er Sheva was of great significance to Yitzchak. There he saw that גרוה was imminent, though עבדות was still distant, but there he also found not only peace and quiet but also honor and recognition. Ya'akov willingly gave up this Be'er Sheva of peace and honor, and set out for Charan.

11 **ויפגע במקום** does not mean that he chanced upon just any place, for Scripture does not say **במקום**, but, rather, **במקום**. Furthermore, **פגע ב-** never denotes merely a chance meeting, but always a meeting where one party makes an impression on the other. By extension, **פגע ב-** also denotes seeking out someone, to meet him in an armed encounter, or to make a request of him; to attack him or to plead with him. Here, too, then, **ויפגע במקום** means: the place fascinated him or especially attracted him.

He departs from his native land penniless and empty-handed. What is more, he is heading toward Lavan, whose character is surely known to him. He is on his way to take a wife. All his thoughts are directed to his destination, Charan, when suddenly "he was struck by the place," it captivated him. The grandeur of the place he was about to leave attracted him.

**ויילן שם כי בא השמש**. It appears, however, that the impression the place made upon him was not strong enough by itself to hold him, and he would not have remained there, had not the sun already set.

**ויקח מאבני המקום וישם מראשתיו**. He took some of the stones of the place and arranged them round his head, so that, while he slept, no man or beast would tread on him. *This was the first house that he built for himself.*

Hence we see Ya'akov, like Avraham, carrying out his own **לך לך**; we see him, too – our last patriarch, for whose arrival all the experiences of Avraham and Yitzchak were merely preparation – going forth into isolation. But his departure differs from that of Avraham. True, Avraham left his homeland to go into isolation, but he did so as the head of a family, with his wife and the members of his household, with relatives and with *wealth*. Ya'akov, however, owing to the circumstances, took nothing at all with him. He left everything for his elder brother, to prove to him that in taking the **בכורה** he was not seeking any material advantage.

*Ya'akov goes forth in order to establish a Jewish home, and to achieve this he needs only the resources inherent in his own personality.* Thus begins the story of Ya'akov, for everything that follows revolves around the *establishment of that home*. Ya'akov was the first to give expression to the idea that *God is to be sought within the home*. He was the first to articulate the profound idea of **בית אלקים** (below, v. 17), **ביהאל** (below, v. 19 and 35:15), "the house of God," which essentially means: *The sphere in which man blossoms and thrives, the place to which he brings all that he acquires and in which he acts and builds his life — that sphere is the greatest and nearest place for the revelation of God.*

Ya'akov fulfilled in his life what Noach had envisioned at the new beginning of human history: Whereas the culture of Yefes ennobles men's souls through the sense of beauty, the mission of Shem is "to pitch tents in which the Shechinah may dwell."

The Sages of Israel have expressed an idea that contains within it a complete worldview: **עיקר שכינה בחתונות**, "the principal place of the Shechinah is on earth" (*Bereshis Rabbah* 19:7); or: "The angels laugh at those who raise their eyes toward heaven, imagining they have to seek God up above" (**ספר חסידים**, 18, end); or: "He who is walking out of doors while studying, and interrupts his study and says: 'How beautiful is that tree!' or 'How beautiful is that field!' (thus revealing that, for him, the study of human life and its beauty when lived in accordance with God's Will does not overshadow the beauty of nature) is regarded as though he has forfeited his own soul" (*Avos* 3:7).<sup>1</sup>

These and similar statements are a legacy to us from the spirit of Ya'akov. Under the influence of the culture of Yefes, man flees from ordinary, "prosaic" life and takes refuge in the beautiful "poetry" of nature. The heirs of Ya'akov find God and His Shechinah first and

14 Your seed will be as the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west, to the east, to the north and to the south. And all the families on earth will be blessed through you and your seed.

יְהִי זְרַעְךָ כַּעֲפַר הָאָרֶץ וּפְרָצְתָּ יָמָה וְקִדְמָה וְצָפְנָה וְנִגְבָּה וּבְרָכּוּ בְךָ כָּל-מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה וּבְרָכְךָ:

15 Behold, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go, and

וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי עִמָּךְ וְשָׁמַרְתִּיךָ בְּכָל

והיה תמים. Be his son and heir!" Indeed, the future that was promised to Avraham began to be realized through Ya'akov, who built the first complete Jewish household.

4 בכך ובזרעך (cf. לך ולזרעך in the preceding verse): "It is through you, and through your seed, that all the families on earth will be blessed." The blessing that will emanate from Ya'akov will be twofold: through him as an individual and through his descendants as a nation.

Only by the power of spiritual influence and by the example of a model way of life can one man and one nation be a source of blessing for the entire human race, so that finally the promise will be fulfilled: בְּיָמֵים הַהֵמָּה אֲשֶׁר יִחְזְיוּ עַשְׂרֵה אַנְשִׁים מִכָּל לְשׁוֹנֹת הַגּוֹיִם וְהִחְזִיקוּ בְּכַנֵּף אִישׁ יְהוּדִי לֵאמֹר בְּיָמֵינוּ אֲלֵקִים עִמָּכֶם כִּי שָׁמַעְנוּ אֱלֹקִים עִמָּכֶם, "In those days, when ten men from every language of the nations will seek security, they will catch hold of the garment of a Jewish man and say, 'We would go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (Zechariah 8:23). *Ya'akov as the head of a family, and his descendants as a nation*, will be such a blessing. Ya'akov exhibits the first Jewish home and teaches how, without אבות, without inherited wealth, one can build and live a family life upheld by the blessing and dignity of מלאכה (work), with all its worries, troubles, and griefs.

How to lead a family life, a national life, upheld by the grace of God and refined in accordance with His Will — this, mankind will learn from you and from your descendants.

15 והנה אנכי עמך. I (אנכי) — Who in My attribute of love and compassion bear with man (see Commentary above, 7:4) — am with you. Although



- 17 And he was afraid and said: How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God! and this is a gate to heaven!
- 18 Ya'akov rose up early in the morning, took the stone that he had placed at his head, and set it up as a memorial stone, and he poured oil upon the top of it.

head — God is there! This is Ya'akov's first thought. And then he adds: "And I did not know it!" I did not know that God's glory dwells in this world — together with man!

17 **ויירא**. This new awareness and the new demands that it brought with it are what inspired in him the feeling of awe and fear: "How awesome is this place!" What has been shown to me here is none other than *the house of God, a gate to heaven*. Life on earth can be "God's house," *a house in which God takes up residence*. When the angels ascend and seek God in heaven, they have to descend to find Him on earth among men. Every house that is home to such a life is "a gate to heaven," *a gate through which man enters to cleave to the Shechinah*; it represents a perfect union of the earthly and the heavenly.

18 **מצבה** consists of a *single* stone; **מוזב** is an elevation made of *many* stones. **מצבה** is presented by *nature*; **מוזב** is made by *man*. Before **מתן תורה**, God's providence revealed itself primarily in the ways of nature and in the destiny of man; that is to say, in what man receives from God. Correspondingly, a **מצבה** is a stone taken from *creation*, to commemorate a *Divine deed*. After **מתן תורה**, God wished to be revealed not in what *He* bestows upon man, but in what *man* does with this blessing. That is the purpose of the Lawgiving; *man's deeds* are to attest to God's glory. Hence, after the Lawgiving, the **מצבה** was prohibited (cf. *Devarim* 16:22).

**שמן על ראשה**, to *consecrate the stone*, as in the anointing of the vessels

22 And this stone, which I have set up as a memorial, will be a house of God, and all that You will give me I will tithe to You repeatedly.

כב וְהָאֶבֶן הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר-שָׂמַתִּי מִצְבֵּה יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם וְכָל אֲשֶׁר תִּתֶנּוּ לִי עֹשֶׂר אֲעִשְׂרֶנּוּ לָךְ:

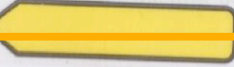
שני

to Ya'akov's redeemed descendants: I have redeemed you לַחַיִּים לָכֶם לְאֱלֹקִים (Bemidbar 15:41) — i.e., so that you should live and refine, in accordance with My Will, the lives you have now regained.

22 “And this stone — which I have set up to commemorate this moment, when I stood, poor and destitute, at the crossroads, looking forward to a future blessed by God — will be a house of God,” in which life is devoted to God and pervaded by His Presence.

Only if ה' is אֱלֹקִים to man can man's house become a house of God. The crooked and perverse generations, which pride themselves in their temples of God, will pervert this truth, too. They will build, as the prophet puts it, סָפָם אֶת-סָפִי, “their threshold next to My threshold” (Yechezkel 43:8), their house next to My House — everything in its own separate domain. “God, too, is to have a House,” they say, “but let not our house be His House! We will visit God in His House, but He must not enter our house; His Presence and His demands would only inconvenience us!”

That is not what Ya'akov says of the foundation stone of the first “house of God”! The sanctity of the homes is the necessary condition for the sanctity of God's House, which is called “מקדש” not because it is the place to which קְדוּשָׁה is relegated, but because it is the center from which קְדוּשָׁה is to flow out and penetrate the human realm and human relations. וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ, Scripture says of the personal and national life that Ya'akov's descendants are to build on the foundation of this stone; וְהָיָה לְכָל צִבְיֹתָי בְּחַוְלֹתָי (Shemos 25:8); וְהָיָה לְכָל צִבְיֹתָי בְּחַוְלֹתָי (Vayikra 26:12). Even of army camps in wartime, it says: ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ מִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּקִרְבְּךָ מִחֹנֶךָ (Devarim 23:15). And finally, on the strength of this stone, וְהָיָה כָּל-כֵּל בִּירוּשָׁלַם וּבִיהוּדָה קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה, צִבְיֹתָי, “All the cooking vessels in Yerushalayim and Yehudah will be holy unto God” (Zecharyah 14:21).



7 The messengers returned to Ya'akov and said: We came to your brother, to Esav, and he is even coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.

ז וַיָּשִׁבוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים אֶל-יַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר בָּאנוּ אֶל-אֶחָיוֹ אֶל-עֵשָׂו וְגַם הֵלֵךְ לִקְרֹאתָךְ וְאַרְבַּע-מֵאוֹת אִישׁ עִמּוֹ:

8 Ya'akov was very much afraid and distressed, so he divided the people who were with him, as well as the flocks, cattle and camels, into two camps.

ח וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיִּצְרָר לוֹ וַיַּחֲזֵן אֶת-הָעֶם אֲשֶׁר-אִתּוֹ וְאֶת-הַצֹּאן וְאֶת-הַבָּקָר וְהַגְּמָלִים לְשְׁנֵי מַחֲנֹת:

right to inform you of all this, so that the long period of suffering may atone for the past, and so that my present wealth may be an intercessor for me with you.

8 We can put ourselves in Ya'akov's place, and we are especially obligated to do so, considering the significance of the impending meeting; for, because of this meeting, Ya'akov experienced a revelation whose memory is forever linked with the daily meal of the man of Israel.

Just as Ya'akov and Esav oppose each other here, so they continue to stand opposed to one another unto this very day. Ya'akov is the family man blessed with children; hard-working, serving, weighed down by cares. Esav is the "finished and accomplished" man (cf. Commentary above, 25:25).

Ya'akov now returns as the independent head of a family. Even now, having overcome all the obstacles, this privilege is, to him, the highest prize, the greatest achievement. But to attain it, he had to toil and struggle for twenty years, despite the fact that he had already received the blessing and the birthright.

Others, however, take this privilege for granted; it is given to them from birth. Esav, the "finished and accomplished" man, already possessed it in full measure when Ya'akov first left home. While Ya'akov, through hard work, succeeded in establishing a family, Esav became a political force, the leader of an army, an אלוף at the head of his troops.

4 Ya'akov sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esav, to the land of Se'ir, the field of Edom.

ד וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל-עֵשָׂו אָחָיו אֶרְצָה שְׁעִיר שְׂדֵה אֱדוֹם:

5 He commanded them as follows: Thus shall you say to my lord, to Esav: Thus says your servant Ya'akov: I stayed, as a stranger, with Lavan and was kept back until now.

ה וַיִּצַו אֹתָם לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמְרוּן לְאֲדֹנָי לְעֵשָׂו כֹּה אָמַר עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב עִם-לָבָן וְאָחֵר עַד-עַתָּה:

6 I acquired oxen and donkeys, flocks and servants and maidser-vants, and I wish to inform my lord [of this] in order to find favor in your eyes.

ו וַיְהִי-לִי שׂוֹר וְחֲמֹר צֹאן וְעֶבֶד וְשֹׁפְחָה וְאֲשֻׁלְחָה לְהַגִּיד לְאֲדֹנָי לְמַצְאֵתִי בְּעֵינֶיךָ:

וישלח

5-6 We have already seen why Ya'akov left his father's house empty-handed and penniless (see Commentary above, 27:42). Now, upon his return as a man of means — and especially considering that Esav no longer lives at home — it is imperative that Ya'akov send messengers to inform Esav of his wealth and explain to him how he acquired it.

In three words he reveals to Esav all the bitterness and adversity of his past. Being a stranger, without rights, is a difficult trial anywhere. Staying with Lavan is likewise a difficult trial under any circumstances. But עם לבן גרהי — to stay as a stranger with Lavan — is truly a bitter fate.

ואחר עד עתה, and not because I was so comfortable there; rather, I was forced to stay there until now. I would have gladly returned earlier. But, until six years ago, I had only wives and children, but not a penny of my own. On this difficult, little to be envied course, through twenty years of hardship, I came to have all that I now possess. I consider it

9 He said: If Esav comes to one

תצ  
בראשית כז תולדות

אָבִיו: טו וְהִתְקַח רֶבֶקָה אֶת־בְּגֵדֵי עֵשָׂו  
בְּנֵה הַגְּדֹל הַחֲמֹדֹת אֲשֶׁר אֵתָהּ בַּבַּיִת  
וְתִלְבֹּשׁ אֶת־יַעֲקֹב בְּנֵה הַקָּטָן: טז וְאֵת

Thus the external contrast between Ya'akov, who held on to his brother's heel when they were born, and Esav, the "accomplished" man.

In Ya'akov and Esav, two opposing principles confront each other. The struggle between them, and the outcome of this struggle, are the forces that have shaped world history. Ya'akov represents family life, happiness and making others happy. Esav represents the glitter of political power and might. This conflict has raged for thousands of years: Is it sufficient just to be a human being, and are political power and social creativity of no significance unless they lead to the loftiest of all human aspirations, or, on the contrary, does everything that is human in man, in home, and in family life exist only to serve the purposes of political triumph?

How different from his attitude toward Lavan is Ya'akov's attitude

רש"י

(טו) החמדת. הנקיות, כתרנומו דְּקִיָּתָא. דצר אחר,  
שחמד אותן מן נמרוד ק (צ"ר סה טז): **אשר אתה**  
בבית. והלא כמה נשים היו לו, והוא מפקיד **אלו אמו**  
אלא שהיה זקי צמעשיהן וחושדן (סס): (יט) אנכי  
עשו בכורד. אנכי המציא לך, ועשו הוא בכורד ר (ע"י  
זהר ח"א קסז): עשיתי. כמה דצרים כאשר דצרת אלי:  
(כא) גשה נא ואמישך. אמר יחמק בלצו, אין דרך  
אמר כי הקרה ה' אלהיך (צ"ר סה יט):

שפתי חכמים

ק פירוש שהבגדים היו בהם ציורין של כל מיני חיות וכשלבשן נמורד  
ויצא לשדה היו החיות סוכרין שהוא חיה ובאין אצלו, ועשו הרג את נמרוד  
ולקחן: **ר דאם** לא כן היה יעקב מדבר שקר ח"ו. וא"ת והלא עדיין  
היה משקר כיון שעשו מכר לו הבכורה ואיך אמר עשו הוא בכורד. וי"ל  
דהוא לא לקחה מעשו אלא לענין עבודה אבל הבכורה נשארה עדיין לעשו  
לענין נחלת פי שנים. ועוד י"ל דעשו היה בכור ללידה וק"ל: **ש ואם**  
תאמר והא יצחק היה מחזיק את עשו לצדיק גמור. וי"ל דהיא הנותנת כיון  
שצדיק גמור הוא לכך אינו מוציא שם שמים לבטלה. ואף על פי דכל  
**שבה. לשון מיסב על השלחן, לכך מתורגם אֶסְפַּחֲר:**  
עשו להיות שם שמים שגור צפיו ש זה

מוסף רש"י

צנית (פסחים נד): **החמדת. הנקיות**. רגס אונקלוס  
דכיתא (דניאל י ג): [טז] דולקת. שפיתיה, שון צשר חלק (סוטה  
יא): **צואריו**. כן דרך המקרא לכחצו צואריו, לשון רצים (מגילה  
טז): [כ] כי הקרה. לשון הזמנה (במדבר לה יא):

[טז] את בגדי עשו החמדת אשר אתה בבית. "צגדו  
של אדם הראשון". שהיו חקוקות צו כל מין חיה וצמחה, והוא  
נמסר לנמרוד, על כן יאמר כנמרוד גבור ליד (לעיל י ט) ועשו הרגו  
ונטלו לפיכך היה איש ליד, והן שכתוב בהן החמודות אשר אתה

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>11 God then said to him: I am the All-sufficing God. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a community of nations shall come into being from you; kings shall come forth from your loins.</p> | <p>יֵא וַיֹּאמֶר לּוֹ אֱלֹהִים אֲנִי אֵל שְׂדֵי<br/>פְּרֵה וּרְבֵה גּוֹי וּקְהַל גּוֹיִם יִהְיֶה<br/>מִמֶּךָ וּמְלָכִים מִחֲלֻצֶיךָ יֵצְאוּ:<br/>שְׂשִׁי</p> |
| <p>12 And the land that I have given to Avraham and Yitzchak, I will give to you; and to your seed after you I will give the land.</p>  | <p>יב וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי<br/>לְאַבְרָהָם וּלְיִצְחָק לְךָ אֶתְנַנֶּה<br/>וּלְיִרְעָה אֶחְרִיד אֶתֶּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ:</p>                             |

-12 גוי וקהל גוים. The nation that will descend from you is to be *one single unit outwardly oriented, and a multiplicity of elements united into one — inwardly oriented*. Each tribe is to represent a special national quality; is to be, as it were, a nation in miniature.

The people of Ya'akov is to become "Yisrael," is to reveal to the nations God's power, which controls and masters all earthly human affairs, shaping everything in accordance with His Will. Hence, this people should not present a one-sided image. As a model nation, it should reflect diverse national characteristics. Through its tribes, it should represent the warrior nation, the merchant nation, the agricultural nation, the nation of scholars, and so forth. In this manner it will become clear to all that the sanctification of human life in the Divine covenant of the Torah does not depend on a particular way of life or national characteristic. Rather, all of mankind, with all its diversity, is called upon to accept the uniform spirit of the God of Israel. From the diversity of human and national characteristics will emerge one united kingdom of God.

Accordingly, *וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְךָ אֶתְנַנֶּה* might mean as Sforno interprets: And to your seed who follow in your footsteps I will give the whole world, as it says: צְדִיקִים יִרְשׁוּ־אֶרֶץ (Tehillim 37:29). By faithfully upholding their spiritual and moral heritage, they will be a light unto the nations (cf. Yeshayahu 2:3).

7 1 *Ya'akov settled in the land of his father's sojourning, in the land of Canaan.* לו וישב יעקב בארץ מגורי אביו בארץ כנען:

2 *These are Ya'akov's descendants: Yosef, at the age of seventeen, as a shepherd, was with his brothers with the sheep, but as a youth he was with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and Yosef reported their idle talk to his father in an evil manner.* ב אלה תלדות יעקב יוסף בן שבע-עשרה שנה היה רעה את-אחיו בצאן והוא נער את-בני בילה ואת-בני זלפה נשי אביו ויבא יוסף את-דבתם רעה אל-אביהם:

וישב

CHAPTER 37

1-2 *וישב יעקב בארץ מגורי אביו* and *גור* are, in a way, opposites. *ישב* is related to *יצב*. *יצב* denotes standing firmly, with strength that overcomes obstacles (in accordance with the צ sound). *ישב* — in accordance with the ש sound — denotes staying quietly, naturally, undisturbed. By contrast, a *גור* stays in a place where he does not belong, without land on which to stand. (Thus, applied to mental states, *גור* means: to lose one's hold, to lose one's composure, to be afraid, terrified.)

Where his fathers had found only temporary rest on their wandering paths, Ya'akov now hoped to settle down quietly, after his many wanderings. After all, this was the land of Canaan, the land that had been promised for quiet development. But, by God's plan, the time for that had not yet arrived.

Rather, only now do we come to *יעקב יעקב*. Until now, before he settled down as the head of an independent family, he was essentially a part of *יצחק יצחק*; he was passive and dependent on the family history of Yitzchak. Only now begins a new stage of Jewish history, beginning with Ya'akov and his household.

37 *Samlah died, and Sha'ul, from Rechovos on the river, reigned in his stead.* לו וימת שמלה וימלך תחתיו שאול מרחובות הנחר:

38 *Sha'ul died, and Ba'al Chanan the son of Achbor reigned in his stead.* לח וימת שאול וימלך תחתיו בעל חנן בן-עכבור:

39 *Ba'al Chanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar reigned in his stead, and the name of his city was Pa'u. His wife's name was Meheitav'el, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mei Zahav.* לט וימת בעל חנן בן-עכבור וימלך תחתיו הדר ושם עירו פעו ושם אשתו מהיטבאל בת-מטרד בת מי זהב: מפטיר

40 *And these are the names of the chieftains of Esav, according to their families, according to their places with their names: Chief Timna, Chief Alvah, Chief Yeses,* מ ואלה שמות אלופי עשו למשפחתם למקמתם בשמתם אלופי תמנע אלופי עלנה אלופי יתת:

41 *Chief Aholivamah, Chief Elah, Chief Pinon,* מא אלופי אהליבמה אלופי אלה אלופי פינן:

42 *Chief Kenaz, Chief Teiman, Chief Mivtzar,* מב אלופי חנן אלופי תימן אלופי מבצר:

43 *Chief Magdi'el [and] Chief Iram. These are the chieftains of Edom, according to their dwelling places in the land of their possession. This is Esav, the ancestor of [the people of] Edom.* מג אלופי מגדיאל אלופי עירם אלה אלופי אדום למשבתם בארץ אחזתם הוא עשו אבי אדום: ספס

707  
 ה וַיִּחַלֵּם יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם וַיַּגִּד לְאָחָיו  
 וַיֹּסֶפּוּ עוֹד שְׂנֵא אֹתוֹ:  
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׁמְעוּ-נָא הַחֲלוֹם  
 הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חֲלַמְתִּי:  
 וַהֲנִיחָה אֲנִיחֵנוּ מֵאֲלֵמִים אֲלֵמִים  
 בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה קִמָּה אֲלֵמְתִי  
 וְנִסְ-נִעְבְּדָה וְהִנֵּה תִסְפְּינָה  
 אֲלֵמְתֵיכֶם וְתִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְאֲלֵמְתִי:

וְנִסְ-נִעְבְּדָה. They could not speak with him לשלום — i.e., in a way that would lead to peace. Or: they could not abide it when he spoke to them in a friendly manner. Where there is friendship, nothing is taken amiss. But in a strained relationship, everything is taken amiss, especially friendly overtures.

5-6 He had a dream and told his brothers about it. When he began to confide his dream to them, they wanted to hear no more of it. But he insisted (v. 6): "You simply must hear this dream that I had!" (For the etymology of חלום, see Commentary above, 20:3.)  
 Our Sages speculate whether there is any significance to dreams (see Berachos 55a). But that Providence uses this half-conscious state to plant thoughts in a person's mind, and thereby to devise a whole series of events; that God exploits people's belief in dreams — this we see repeatedly in the history of Ya'akov and Yosef.

7-8 The word והנה occurs three times in verse 7, to emphasize three distinct points in the dream.

הנה does not mean "in the field," as the Hebrew for "in the field" is בשדה. Also, there is a distinction between אלמים and אלמות. In Peah 6:10 a distinction is made between אנודים and אנודות, and — ac-

3 וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת-יוֹסֵף מִכָּל-  
 בָּנָיו כִּי-בְדוֹ-זְקָנִים הוּא לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה  
 לוֹ בְּתִנְתַּת פָּסִים:  
 וַיִּרְאוּ אָחָיו כִּי-אֵתוֹ אָהָב אָבִיהֶם  
 מִכָּל-אָחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָבִילוּ  
 דְבָרוֹ לְשָׁלָם:

his [other] sons, because he was a son of his old age, and [Yisrael] made an embroidered coat for him.

4 When his brothers saw that it was he whom their father loved more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

in Yosef; in Yosef he saw the heir to all his spiritual attainments (see Commentary above, 21:7).

פסים — from the root פסס, to cease, to end — apparently denotes the trimming at the edges of a garment. This trimming used to be made on every garment that served to mark the importance of the personality. (A parallel, perhaps, is עדה — the general term for decoration — whose other meaning, like that of פסס, is "to cease"; thus עד, "until a certain point.") In any case, the כהנח פסים was a mark of distinction, which served to single out Yosef as chosen for a special calling.

That all this was not judicious or wise; that Ya'akov should have rejected the bad reports; that, generally, favoritism shown to one child had and has only harmful effects in the history of our forefathers and in the history of any home — these are made abundantly clear by the bitter consequences that ensue in this story. These are weaknesses that can easily recur in anyone's life, but are nonetheless weaknesses.

4 The verse's structure emphasizes אהו. Precisely he who did not belong to them, who was not on friendly terms with them, who had brought many reproaches upon them — it was precisely he whom their father preferred.

אהב — אהב with an individualizing א — means: to give oneself up completely to another and to seek the other's extreme closeness. The opposite of אהב is שנא (סנה): to be like a thorn — i.e., to fend off the other and keep him as far away from oneself as possible. The extremes produced each other: the father's love begat the brothers' hate.

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## I TOROTH Chapter 14

abstaining; secondly, how *perishuth*, abstinence, is only a very early outer stage on the way to *chasiduth*, the highest. Do not therefore abuse the term *chasid* by applying it to men whom you know to have only *perishuth*, which, as already observed, even where it is pure, is only a disciple's stage on the way to the master's quality which is *chasiduth*—not to mention the case where what you perceive is not even *perishuth*, but the mere outward gestures of holiness.

### 15

### HATRED

### שְׂנֵאָה

*Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart.* LEVIT. XIX, 17.

- 113 Hatred is the feeling that the existence of any being is a hindrance to our own existence, and that the destruction of that being would make our own existence more complete. In other words, it means that we do not feel ourselves *whole* so long as this or that is still existing. This feeling is the death, nay, the complete inversion, of the human heart, which God has created for the comprehensive embrace of all beings, but which instead excludes one or all beings to the extent of desiring their non-existence, and embraces only itself—in fact becomes a stone. As soon, therefore, as you perceive hatred springing up in your heart against any being, know for certain that you have failed to attain your proper moral level.
- 114 It is a sad privilege of man that he is able to love and fondle every creature and yet to hate those of his own species! Hatred between man and man arises from the fact (1) that one has in fact injured the other with wrongful word or deed and so has really endangered his existence; or (2) that they come into conflict in the pursuit of the same objective, and so apparently frustrate one another.
- 115 This feeling should never remain in your heart against any man. He is, after all, your brother, a child of the same God, placed in the world by Him with the same claims on life. If you hate him and wish him away, then you hate and wish away the hand of God, which has placed your brothers next to you in order that you may esteem them as brothers. Even if he wrongs you, do not forget that he is your brother. Be sorry that your brother can make such a mistake, reprove him—and forget.

## Hatred

But consider above all whether it is not altogether a delusion, a falsehood, that the existence of any human being can do harm to your existence, that his destruction is necessary to save you? Is it then your fellow-men, is it you yourself, is it he, who procures for you the means of existence? Can you do anything more than sow the seed with your industry and await the fructifying blessing from above? Is it not God Who distributes all the means of life, Who showers down blessings or curses on the labours of man? And is His hand too weak, His love too niggardly, to bring into life, to sustain and to give the joy of life to you and to millions more with you? Must He withdraw from you the blessing which He apportions to your brother next to you? And if your brother were eliminated, would not your well-being even then still depend, as it does now, on the same all-ruling providence of God? Ah, if you would but consider that you will still obtain such recognition as God ordains for you, that you will still occupy the place which God assigns to you, that you will still receive the sum of possessions which He determines for you, even though millions more along with you strive for the same thing; and that if you do not get something, it is not because another competes with you for it, but because God's wise decision has not ordained it for you. Do you not see that the greed for food, honour and fortune which makes you hate your brother is a denial of God, a denial that it is one and the same God Whose love covers all men equally and Who, as Supreme Ruler, determines the lot of each one? Lay the seed of your own good fortune alongside millions of others, and pray to God that they may all come to fruition for the good of all. He is rich enough in love and power to fulfil such an unselfish prayer.

But, you say, it is the sinful word or deed of your brother which, like a lighted torch thrown into a building, has shattered your life and fortunes; shall you not hate him for that? Hate? No! In this, too, pay homage to the providence of God, which, high above the comprehension of the human mind, makes the very crime of the wicked the punishment and discipline of the one who is to be improved, the testing exercise of one who is capable of being taught. Could the edifice of your fortunes be shattered if God did not allow it? Could it not equally have been destroyed even if no sinner had furnished his crime as the instrument? Accept this suffering therefore like any other from the hand of God and use it for your own improvement or ennoblement. Wait for God, Who leads from night to morning, from sorrow to joy, from death to life. Leave it to God to bring the wicked to account for his wickedness, but do not hate, do not sin through hate. Has he sinned against you, reduced your property to ruins? Has he not sinned against God and laid his sacrilegious hand on the holy things of God?



5 Yosef had a dream and told it to his brothers, and they then hated him all the more.  
 ה ויחלם יוסף חלום ויגיד לאחיו ויוסף עוד שנא אתו:

6 But he said to them: Please listen to this dream that I have dreamt.  
 ו יואמר אליהם שמעו־נא החלום הזה אשר חלמתי:

7 Lo! we were piling up sheaves in the middle of the field and lo! my sheaf arose and remained upright, while your sheaves surrounded my sheaf and bowed down to it!  
 ו והנה אנחנו קמלים אלים בתוך השדה והנה קמה אלמתי וגם־נצבה והנה תסבינה אלמתיכם ותשתחונו לאלמתי:

ולא יכלו וגו'. They could not speak with him לשלום — i.e., in a way that would lead to peace. Or: they could not abide it when he spoke to them in a friendly manner. Where there is friendship, nothing is taken amiss. But in a strained relationship, everything is taken amiss, especially friendly overtures.

5-6 He had a dream and told his brothers about it. When he began to confide his dream to them, they wanted to hear no more of it. But he insisted (v. 6): "You simply must hear this dream that I had!" (For the etymology of חלום, see Commentary above, 20:3.)

Our Sages speculate whether there is any significance to dreams (see Berachos 55a). But that Providence uses this half-conscious state to plant thoughts in a person's mind, and thereby to devise a whole series of events; that God exploits people's belief in dreams — this we see repeatedly in the history of Ya'akov and Yosef.

7-8 The word והנה occurs three times in verse 7, to emphasize three distinct points in the dream.

בתוך השדה does not mean "in the field," as the Hebrew for "in the field" is בשדה. Also, there is a distinction between אלמים and אלמות. In Peah 6:10 a distinction is made between אנודים and אגודות, and — ac-

his [other] sons, because he was a son of his old age, and [Yisrael] made an embroidered coat for him.  
 בנניו קיי־בן־זקנים הוא לו ועשה לו בתנת פסים:

4 When his brothers saw that it was he whom their father loved more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.  
 ו ויראו אחיו קיי־אתו אהב אביהם מכל־אחיו וישנאו אתו ולא יכלו דברו לשלום:

in Yosef; in Yosef he saw the heir to all his spiritual attainments (see Commentary above, 21:7).

פסים — from the root פסס, to cease, to end — apparently denotes the trimming at the edges of a garment. This trimming used to be made on every garment that served to mark the importance of the personality. (A parallel, perhaps, is עדה — the general term for decoration — whose other meaning, like that of פסס, is "to cease"; thus עד, "until a certain point.") In any case, the כתנת פסים was a mark of distinction, which served to single out Yosef as chosen for a special calling.

That all this was not judicious or wise; that Ya'akov should have rejected the bad reports; that, generally, favoritism shown to one child had and has only harmful effects in the history of our forefathers and in the history of any home — these are made abundantly clear by the bitter consequences that ensue in this story. These are weaknesses that can easily recur in anyone's life, but are nonetheless weaknesses.

4 The verse's structure emphasizes אהו. Precisely he who did not belong to them, who was not on friendly terms with them, who had brought many reproaches upon them — it was precisely he whom their father preferred.

אהב — אהב with an individualizing א — means: to give oneself up completely to another and to seek the other's extreme closeness. The opposite of אהב is שנא (סנה): to be like a thorn — i.e., to fend off the other and keep him as far away from oneself as possible. The extremes produced each other: the father's love begat the brothers' hate.

9 He had another dream and told it to his brothers. He said: Lo! I had another dream, and lo! the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me.

ט וַיַּחְלֵם עוֹד חֲלוֹם אֲחֵר וַיִּסְפֹּר אֹתוֹ לְאֶחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה חֲלֹמְתֵי חֲלוֹם עוֹד וְהִנֵּה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְאַחַד עָשָׂר כּוֹכָבִים מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לִי:

10 He told it to his father and his brothers, and his father rebuked him and said to him: What is this dream that you dreamt? Shall I, your mother and your brothers indeed come and bow to the ground before you?

י וַיִּסְפֹּר אֶל-אָבִיו וְאֶל-אֶחָיו וַיִּנְעֲרֵנוּ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא מָה הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חֲלַמְתָּ הַבּוֹא נִבּוֹא אֲנִי וְאִמְךָ וְאֶחָיֶךָ לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְךָ אֶרְצָה:

11 His brothers were envious of him, and his father kept the matter in mind.

יא וַיִּקְנְאוּ-בּוֹ אֶחָיו וְאָבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת-הַדָּבָר: שְׁנֵי

12 His brothers went away — to tend their father's sheep in Shechem.

יב וַיֵּלְכוּ אֶחָיו לְרֻעוֹת אֲבֹתֵי-צֹאן אֲבֵיהֶם בְּשֵׁעָם: נִקְוֶה עַל אֵת

because of the nature of his dream, but also for his impudence — as they saw it — in telling them of it.

10 At first, his brothers did not interpret the dream as referring to themselves. But when they heard their father interpret it in this way, they, too, began to believe in the dream, and they envied Yosef for the great future that was in store for him.

1–12 Following the precedent of Sforno, one of our most thoughtful commentators, we consider it our duty to search, if not for a justification, then at least for an explanation, of the developments that now follow. We are not dealing here with a band of robbers and murderers who

8 His brothers said to him: Would you indeed become king over us, or perhaps already rule over us? and they hated him all the more, for his dreams and for his words.

ז וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אֶחָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם-מִשׁוֹל תִּמְשָׁל בָּנוּ וַיּוֹסְפוּ עוֹד שִׁנְאָה אֹתוֹ עַל-חֲלֹמְתָיו וְעַל-דְּבָרָיו:

cording to one interpretation there — אלומה denotes a small bundle: כריכות קטנות ועושים מג' או ד' עומר אחד (see the רא"ש there). It seems that, in Yosef's dream, first they reaped the entire field and bound the wheat in small sheaves, אלומות; then the small sheaves were piled up to form large heaps, אלומים, in the middle of the reaped field (בתוך השדה).

According to the foregoing, Yosef told his brothers: "In my dream we were not so divided. We were united in our work; we worked together, piling up the small sheaves into large heaps in the middle of the field. I, too, was prepared to add my own small sheaf to the large common heap, but my sheaf could not be moved. It stood up and remained upright; it refused to be carried to the common heap in the center. What is more, your sheaves formed a circle around my sheaf and bowed down before my sheaf!"

This is a perfect portrayal of an isolated individual who towers in stature above his brothers, who are gathered around him in a gesture of obeisance. This happened against his will; he had been prepared to make his own small contribution to the whole, and thereby be integrated with all the others.

It is also interesting to note that the objects in Yosef's dream were sheaves of wheat. Agriculture was not the brothers' occupation; they were shepherds. Their destiny to become an agricultural nation was still in the distant future. If farming was so much in Yosef's thoughts that he even dreamed about it, this could have been so only because his father, Yisrael, had taught him about the national destiny that was in store for his family.

Precisely for this reason the brothers felt justified in their response: "Do you want to become king over us some day? Or do you perhaps want to be ruler over us even now? Such notions should not occur to you even in a dream!" And so they hated him all the more, not only

# The Hirsch Chumash, Bereshis 37:8-12 • Feldheim-Judaica, pp 710-713

13 *Yisrael then said to Yosef: Are not your brothers tending [the sheep] in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them. [Yosef] said to him: I am ready.*

יג וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא אַחֶיךָ רֹעִים בְּשֶׂכֶם לְבָהּ וְאֶשְׁלַחְךָ אֲלֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הֲנִנִּי:

14 *[Yisrael] then said to him: Please go, see how your brothers are faring and how the sheep are faring, and report back to me. He sent him from the Valley of Chevron, and he came to Shechem.*

יד וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לְךָ-נָא רְאֵה אֶת-שְׁלוֹם אַחֶיךָ וְאֶת-שְׁלוֹם הַצֹּאן וְהַשְּׂבָנִי דָבָר וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ מֵעֵמֶק חֶבְרוֹן וַיָּבֹא שְׂכֶמָה:

It is indeed true that their future would have been in jeopardy had Yosef's future position been destined to be as they imagined. After all, not much time had passed since Nimrod had introduced the institution of kingship. Their cousins in Se'ir-Edom were already enslaved to אלופים and to kings. In contrast to this type of monarchy, which debases human dignity and reduces the individual to a mere building brick in the edifice of one man's ambition, the family of Avraham were to found a society based on freedom and equality, in which the innate nobility and dignity of the individual would be recognized, and in which their common mission ומשפט צדקה ומשפט (see above, 18:19) would alone rule equally over all. What would become of their future and of the future of all mankind, if they, too, would become enslaved to the ambitions of one man?

It is remarkable that, centuries later, after the death of Shlomo, when the people sought to impose conditions on Rechav'am and to preserve their independence through revolt, they again gathered in Shechem, out of a sense of brotherhood and equality, to unite there, before God, to oppose a monarchy that was misusing its power. The episode here mirrors, on a smaller scale, that future episode (see *Melachim* I, 12).

13 Ya'akov senses that there is a rift between Yosef and his brothers, and he does not want it to deepen. At the same time, he wants to test Yosef's feelings toward his brothers. He therefore, initially, gives Yosef no special

would lightly commit murder for the sake of a coat. Sforno rightly points out that, later, when they are conscience-stricken at the time of their greatest distress, even then (below, 42:21) they do not blame themselves for committing a crime against Yosef, but *only for their hardheartedness*, which had permitted them to turn a deaf ear to his pleas. The act itself they regard not as criminal but as hardhearted. We must therefore be alert for even the slightest intimations of a psychological explanation of the brothers' behavior.

Their hostile attitude began with קנאה, to which שנאה was then added. They *hated* him because they imagined they could discern his thoughts and plans from his dreams. But they did not yet *fear* him, because they did not believe that his dreams could ever come true. However, when they heard his second dream, which promised him not just a high rank within his own family but supreme authority over all the earth, and when they saw that their father did not take this as a mere dream but pondered over it and seemed to think that it could become reality, their feelings of קנאה were stirred up again. (קנא ב- means: one considers his own just claims to be threatened by another.)

Immediately thereafter — וילכו אחיו. Note how this clause is separated from the rest of the verse by an אתנחתא. "They went away"! It had been deeply impressed upon them that Yosef posed a threat to their rights; hence they went away — and very far away at that. שכם is about 85 kilometers from חברון. According to *Bereshis Rabbah* (84:13), there are dots over the אח in הצאן את הרעות to indicate that they only pretended to go in order to tend the sheep. In reality, they went to "tend" *themselves*; they sought to preserve their independence, which they felt was threatened by Ya'akov's view of Yosef's future position.

It is curious that, of all places, they chose to go to שכם. Was not שכם the place where they had first demonstrated the sense of family solidarity which stirred in their hearts? It was there that Shimon and Levi had posed the penetrating question (above, 34:31): הֲכֹזֶנֶה יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת אַחֵינוּ?

Now, if an entire family stands united as one man when any one of its members is threatened by a foe from without, how much more will it pull together when one of its own members arises from within to threaten the honor and independence of all the rest! This may have been their thinking, and this is why they went to שכם, the site of their act of fraternal solidarity. There they hoped to take courage for the decision that again seemed necessary.

sons' daughters and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt.

בָּנָיו וְכָל־זְרַעוֹ הֵבִיא אִתּוֹ מִצְרַיִם: ם

8 And these are the names of the Children of Israel who came to Egypt — Ya'akov and his sons: Ya'akov's firstborn, Reuven.

ח וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרַיִם: יַעֲקֹב וּבְנָיו בְּכֹר יַעֲקֹב רְאוּבֵן:

9 Reuven's sons: Chanoch, Pallu, Chetzron and Karmi.

ט וּבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן חֲנוּךְ וּפְלֹא וְחֶצְרוֹן וְכַרְמִי:

10 Shimon's sons: Yemu'el, Yamin, Ohad, Yachin, Tzochar and Sha'ul, the son of the Canaanite woman.

י וּבְנֵי שִׁמְעוֹן יִמּוּאֵל וְיָמִין וְאָהָד וְיָכִין וְצַחַר וְשָׂאוּל בֶּן־הַכְּנַעֲנִית:

11 Levi's sons: Gershon, Kehas and Merari.

יא וּבְנֵי לֵוִי גֵרְשׁוֹן קְהָת וּמְרָרִי:

about their father Ya'akov. They went with him and were attached to him, and he brought them all with him to Egypt.

8 Just as generally the Jewish people was built on a modest and pure family life, and just as later the census was always reckoned according to fathers' houses and families, so too here, when they went down to Egypt, they were again enumerated in accordance with their genealogy.

יַעֲקֹב וּבְנָיו. They came so united that Ya'akov himself is counted together with his sons.

has loved long enough to see fulfillment of "הַבְּרִית" ח"י

10 וּשְׂאוּל בֶּן הַכְּנַעֲנִית. If this כְּנַעֲנִית is Dinah, who was married to Shimon (see Bereshis Rabbah 80:11), then שְׂאוּל may not be a son of Shimon, but the son born to Dinah by Shechem. If so, then we see that even this son was not estranged from Ya'akov's family. She is called "כְּנַעֲנִית" because her son was physically a כְּנַעֲנִי.

We see, then, that, even at this early stage, the principle was that

5 Ya'akov rose up from Be'er Sheva, and the sons of Yisrael conveyed their father, Ya'akov, their children and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him in.

ה וַיָּקָם יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעַר שֶׁבַע וַיֵּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־יַעֲקֹב אֶבְיָהֶם וְאֶת־טַפָּם וְאֶת־נְשֵׂיהֶם בְּעֲגָלוֹת אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח פַּרְעֹה לְשִׂאת אֹתוֹ:

6 They took their herds and their movable goods which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and they came to Egypt — Ya'akov and all his descendants with him.

ו וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־מִקְנֵיהֶם וְאֶת־רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ מִצְרַיִם יַעֲקֹב וְכָל־זְרַעוֹ אִתּוֹ:

7 His sons and his sons' children with him, his daughters and his

ז בָּנָיו וּבְנֵי בָנָיו אִתּוֹ בָּנָתָיו וּבָנוֹת

bring in its wake joy and greatness. There, in Egypt, I will fulfill My promise to make of you a great nation. I Myself will accompany you (and your whole family) down to Egypt, and (after you have become a great nation) I will bring you back up again. As for you personally, you will never lose Yosef again." (Cf. above, 15:1.)

5 At the start of his journey, his joy was complete. Hence in verse 1 it does not say "ויקם." Now, however, he needed to recover. Hence it says here "ויקם."

Here again, the change in names is significant. The family was in a joyous mood. They — "Yisrael's sons" — had received no intimation of the difficult future that awaited them in Egypt. Ya'akov, however, was expecting גְלוּת. Hence it says: "Yisrael's sons conveyed their father Ya'akov."

6-7 They all were with him; they all were his children. Ya'akov did not suffer the grief experienced by his fathers, the grief of one son becoming spiritually estranged. Rather, they all were his children and grandchildren, and although they already formed many families, they all gathered

when he blessed them; he blessed them each according to what was in character with his particular blessing.

אֲבִיהֶם וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כָּבַרְתָּו בְּכַרְךָ אֹתָם:

as two tribes, nor eleven, with Reuven omitted. They are all שבטי ישראל, integral parts of the whole, of Israel's foundation, twelve pillars implanted by God in the midst of the ages, on which the structure of the nation is to rise.

וּזֹאת, "and this" [i.e., all that Ya'akov said above in this chapter] is not the blessing that Ya'akov gave to his sons, for in part it is only characterization. Rather, "this is what their father said about them," this is how he characterized them (דבר להם) when he blessed them (ויברך אותם).

אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כָּבַרְתָּו בְּכַרְךָ אֹתָם. After characterizing them, he blessed each one in keeping with the blessing appropriate to his individuality. After describing the individuality and significance of each of his sons, he blessed each one accordingly. Ya'akov's blessing to each one of his sons was that each one should find blessing and happiness by remaining true to his individual personality.

Even those who did receive a blessing together with the designation of their character — and perhaps they, most of all — were in need of the special blessing mentioned here (v. 28), so that their outwardly blessed position would prove to be a blessing to them. For God cannot make a person happy against his will and without his cooperation. Conversely, a Jew worthy of the name will be able to transform even the bitterest experience into a source of great blessing: עֲבָרֵי דְעִמְקָא הֵבְרָא מִצְדָּקָא יִשְׁתַּדְּדוּ (Tehillim 84:7).

Our Sages say (Yalkut Shimoni, Vayechi, 161): Do not think that, because he assigned to Yehudah the strength of a lion, to Binyamin the boldness of a wolf, to Naftali the swiftness of a gazelle, etc., Ya'akov did not include them all in all of the blessings. For this reason Scripture does not say בְּכַרְךָ אוֹתוֹ but rather בְּכַרְךָ אוֹתָם: Each one benefitted from the general blessing of the community, while the special blessing of each one enhanced the community.

27 Binyamin will tear the wolf to pieces; in the morning he will devour a piece, but in the evening he will divide it as spoil.

כֹּחַ בְּנִימִין זֹאב יִטְרַף בְּבֹקֶר יֹאכַל עֵד וְלָעֶרֶב יַחְלֶק שְׂלָל:

28 All these are tribes of Israel, twelve, and this is what their father proclaimed about them

כֹּחַ כָּל-אֵלֶּה שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר וְזֹאת אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר לָהֶם

27 In describing his youngest son as a "ravenous wolf," Ya'akov appears to conclude his testament on a bitter note. However, note that it does not say זאב טורף, but, rather, זאב יטרף. Accordingly, זאב could be the object of the verb יטרף. Thus: "Binyamin will tear apart the wolf."

In speaking here of a wolf, Ya'akov is taking a last look at his "flock." For twenty years he guarded his flock of sheep against attacks by real wolves. Now he sees all his children before him. He has given them his blessing; he has recognized and described the individual significance of each one of them for all time to come. And so his final glance comes to rest upon the end of days, when the last of the world powers, המלכות, will be overcome. He beholds the גלות and the גלות-forces against which his descendants will have to struggle, and he says: It will be the smallest and youngest of the sons who will drive the "wolf" (eternal Amalek) away from the flock of Ya'akov. Already in the early morning, at the outset of the nation's history, he will deal the wolf a powerful blow, but in the evening of time he will destroy the wolf completely.

Indeed, Aggadic tradition (מסורת אגדה) has it that Amalek, the arch-enemy, will not be destroyed by Yehudah, but by the youngest among Rachel's sons: אִם-לֹא יִקְבּוּם צְעִירֵי הַצֹּאן (Yirmeyahu 49:20) — "the youngest of the flock" will drag them off as spoil (see Bereshis Rabbah 99:2).

עֵד — from the root עָדַד, related to חָתַת, to break up — denotes a piece torn off.

28 כל אלה שבטי ישראל שנים עשר. All these are tribes of Israel: they are twelve, no more and no less. They are not thirteen, with Yosef counted

## ***Additional Reading—***

### ***The struggle between power and spirit:***

- ▶ *Commentary on Bereshis 48:19*, pg 858. “זרעו יהיה מלא הגוים”  
“These (power and spirit) are the two crowns that — according to Zechariah 6:13-14 — ultimately will be united...”.

### ***On the opposites, Hatred and Love שנאה אהבה:***

Additional reading: Ahava par 119, etc.

- ▶ *Horeb*, Chapter 15, *Hatred* and Chapter 16, *Love*.

### ***Yosef learns to understand that his brothers are fully innocent:***

- ▶ *Rashi's commentary on Bereshis 27:2*, “את דבתם רעה”.

### ***Yosef bringing out the righteousness of his brothers:***

- ▶ *Bereshis 42:8* and *Commentary on Bereshis 42:9*.

### ***Strength of Bnei Yisrael in the interior of the home:***

- ▶ *Commentary on Bereshis 48:16*. “וידגו לרב בקרב הארץ”  
“They shall live like fish in water, in the midst of mankind on earth.”

### ***Unity of the Shevatim around the spirit of, the mission of, their father:***

- ▶ *Commentary on Bereshis 49:1-2*, “הקבצו” “האספו”.