

The parsha begins with a very strange verse. It says Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojourning. While Yaakov's father and grandfather only lived in Eretz Canaan in a temporary fashion, Yaakov is himself beginning to settle there in a more permanent fashion.

To understand the significance of this, we need to go back to the interaction between Avrohom Ovinu and the bnei Cheis when he is looking for a burial place for Soroh. Avrohom says to them that he is a "ger and toshav." A ger is a temporary resident – someone who doesn't really belong. Toshav means a permanent resident – a citizen in a place you consider your natural home. Avrohom was both a ger and a toshav simultaneously.

At the Bris Bein Habesorim, Hashem tells Avrohom that his descendants will be foreigners for 400 years. Since we know they weren't in Egypt for all 400 years, it means this count began at the birth of Yitzchok. Hashem was telling Avrohom they will still be geirim – strangers – while living in Eretz Canaan.

But Yaakov thought he could start settling down now in the place where his fathers were only temporary visitors. He thought that after overcoming all the difficult ordeals of Lovon, Eisov and Dinoh, he deserved to be at peace. What does this tell us – taking into account the greatness of Yaakov Ovinu, the greatest of the Ovos, chosen to give rise to Klal Yisroel? We spoke about the dream of Yaakov to have twelve sons who were fit to become the nation devoted to avodas Hashem. Yaakov thought that this dream was fulfilled and his mission was complete.

Lovon and Eisov were very negative influences in his life, but Yaakov overcame them. When Yitzchok was born, Soroh protected him from the negative influences of Yishmoel and had him removed from the household. Yaakov was born an ish tom, but then he works on himself through his tests and ordeals. He isn't protected from negative influences. He doesn't just remain the same way he was at birth. He grows and develops towards becoming the perfect human being.

The Torah has a very different view of the human being than modern psychology. Psychologists talk about "discovering your true self" as if there is some core "self" that everyone is born with. They claim once you discover what it is, and you live according to the needs of your true self, all the tensions and inner conflicts in your life automatically disappear. We have a different approach – we believe a person can create himself. The Torah gives us a model of what the ideal human being is, and we have to work to make ourselves into that ideal personality. We are born with certain traits and pre-dispositions – some good, some bad. We are obligated to develop what is good and suppress or eliminate what is bad within ourselves, in order to get closer to that ideal Torah personality.

When he was young, Yaakov is taught the Torah that the Ovos possessed. He learned in the beis midrash of Avrohom and Yitzchok. All sorts of people walked through, they took what they could and they moved on.

Yaakov is an ish emes. He naturally shunned falsehood. But Hashem tested this middoh by telling Rivka that Yaakov needed to get the brochos of Eisov. He needed to fool his father and pretend to be Eisov in order to get those brochos. This is a test to see if his middoh of emes was only some natural feeling inside of him, or it was a middoh of Hashem that he was trying to imitate. Someone who is only naturally truthful won't be able to use deception even when Hashem tells him it

is necessary. Just like Avrohom's middoh of chessed was tested when Hashem told him to do the most cruel thing imaginable – to kill his own son. It would prove that Avrohom's middoh of chessed wasn't just because he was a soft, sensitive person.

Then Yaakov lived with the biggest swindler and deceiver – Lovon – for 20 years, and remained perfectly honest. He didn't learn anything from Lovon for all that time! It took tremendous kochos hanefesh. He had twelve sons who were tzaddikim. He now felt that he had reached a level of perfection and didn't need to struggle anymore. But Hashem said no. He still had twenty-two years left to grow and perfect himself to an even greater degree.

Yaakov is emes, Torah and tiferes. When Yaakov came to Shechem, the verse says he arrived 'sholeim'. Rashi explains he was whole in body, in wealth and in Torah – he didn't forget anything while in Lovon's environment. There is an incredible thing happening here! He was busy with taking care of his growing family and all his sheep, and he didn't forget anything! How did he do that?

We can understand this by what Yaakov did after he parted ways with Eisov. He traveled to Sukkos and built himself a house and temporary corrals for his flocks. Why would Yaakov build a house while he is travelling? And why is the place called Sukkos after the corrals for his flocks? It is all very strange.

The Tur quotes a midrash which says each of the Ovos corresponds to one of the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuos and Sukkos. Yaakov represents Sukkos. What does Yaakov have to do with Sukkos? The Targum Yonason says the house Yaakov built on his way to Yitzchok wasn't a house to live in – it was a beis midrash. This was his permanent dwelling place – because to Yaakov, everywhere else is only temporary. This reveals Yaakov's mindset throughout his 20 years with Lovon. His job, his parnossoh – taking care of sheep – this was only a temporary activity. His real occupation was learning Torah.

When Yaakov's family went to Egypt in Parshas Vayigash, the verses count the Bnei Yisroel who are coming down. Surprisingly, it lists Yosef, Menashe and Efrayim in the 70 souls. But Yosef was already in Egypt! Menashe and Efrayim never left Egypt! How could they be coming down along with Klal Yisroel from Canaan?

The midrash says that during one of the interactions between Yosef and his brothers, Menashe gave a stomp with his foot. The shevotim commented among themselves that this kind of stomping was characteristic of the way we stomp our feet! It means when Yosef raised his children, he raised them with all the mannerisms and body language of the household he grew up with in Canaan. Mentally, Yosef and his sons were still living in Canaan with the rest of Yaakov's family. You are where your mind is. So when Yaakov's family moved from Canaan to Egypt, Yosef and his sons also moved along with them.

Yaakov's mind was permanently in the beis midrash. You are where your mind is, and Yaakov's mind was continually preoccupied with Torah, no matter what he happened to be doing for a living.

There is a very important Tosfos in Brochos. He asks why we only make one bircas haTorah in the morning and we aren't obligated to make a new bircas haTorah every time we learn throughout the day? After all, when you take off and put on tallis and tefillin throughout the day, you need to make a new brocho each time.

He answers that Talmud Torah is like Rabbeinu Tam's approach to

bircas lesheiv ba'sukkah. You only make one brocho at the beginning of a meal even though you are also doing other activities throughout the day. The whole halocho of yeshivas sukkah is to be established in the sukkah, and meals are the way you establish yourself in a place. Torah has to be where you are based – regardless of whatever you are doing throughout the day. Everything you do in life has to revolve around Torah. Everything you think about has to be connected to Torah. This is how Yaakov survived Lovon's house. Torah was the center of his life and everything he did was based on Torah.

What does it mean to be a ben Torah? It means your life surrounds what the Torah requires of you. You are constantly asking yourself – does this activity fit with Torah or not? Does it promote Torah values and ideals? Is it against Torah values and ideals? Or is it neutral?

This is why Yaakov was able to give rise to Klal Yisroel – although each shevet had its own derech avodoh, they all sprung from Yaakov who was the embodiment of Torah – it was the center of his life at all times.

Being a ben Torah is sometimes easy, and sometimes is hard. When you live in a world that is surrounded by so many crazy influences and ideas and behaviors that are running around all over the place, you need to know who you are in all of this. You form your identity according to the way the Torah wants you to be. It doesn't happen instantly. It is a process.

How did Yaakov withstand any influence of Lovon for 20 years? Because Yaakov constantly was asking himself if this activity is fitting with the Torah or not. He didn't let go of that focus for a minute. This is what separates a ben Torah from a non-ben Torah. A ben Torah is someone who makes every decision based on Torah.

Yaakov Ovinu could found Klal Yisroel and withstand all the influences only because he prepared himself in the yeshiva of Shem v'Ever. It was an atmosphere with no outside influences where he could learn to focus exclusively on Torah.

A yeshiva is supposed to set up an environment where we can focus on making Torah the center of our lives. We say in davening that Hashem gave us Torah as a way to connect to Him as an expression of love. Why? Because Torah is supposed to change you and make your thought process closer to Hashem's thought process. But the Rambam adds a condition. You have to want the Torah to mold you and shape you into someone different.

The purpose of a yeshiva is to prepare you for life. While you are here, you form yourself and shape yourself into being a ben Torah for the rest of your life. It's not just a nice experience in a foreign country where you picked up a few mesechtos. It is supposed to help you make Torah the center of your life where all your decisions are based on what the Torah wants of you.

This was Yaakov Ovinu – Torah was where he always belonged in his mind.

When I came to Eretz Yisroel an American avreich came to me and asked me for advice. He said: I have been living here and learning in kollel for a number of years and I just received a prestigious fellowship

from a university with tremendous benefits. Should I take the offer?

I asked him to come in and sit down to talk about it, but he said he just wanted an answer on the spot while he is waiting at the door. So I said: you just have to ask yourself one simple question – is taking this fellowship going to give you a bigger portion of olom haboh or a smaller portion? Once you make that determination, everything else falls into place.

This person just turned around and left and that was the end of the conversation!

Years later I come to England for a speaking engagement and afterwards someone I did not recognize came over to me and hugged and kissed me. He told me: you saved my life! I asked him: I'm sorry, can you remind me how I know you? He said he is the person all those years back who asked the question about taking the fellowship. He confessed that he never thought in those terms before I made it so clear to him.

"What does Hashem want from me? What does the Torah demand of me?" This is the question a ben Torah asks himself constantly. Learn this lesson because it is the most important lesson you will ever learn. It is how Yaakov survived all his tests. It is how Yosef haTzaddik survived 22 years in Egypt. Not only was he mentally still in his father's house. He kept his father's Torah in his mind the entire time.

When the brothers came back to Canaan after Yosef revealed himself to them, they wanted to tell Yaakov that Yosef is still alive. But Yaakov has some hesitation before accepting the good news. Why? He favored Yosef because Yosef was his greatest talmid and he gave over all his Torah to Yosef. Now he goes missing for 22 years. The only reason Yaakov would be consoled knowing that Yosef is still alive in Egypt is if Yosef was still the same Yosef who left him 22 years ago. But if Yosef became some tyrannical Egyptian ruler who spent his time terrorizing his family, Yaakov would not get any comfort. So Yosef sent a message – don't worry, I'm still the same Yosef. I'm sending the agolos as a sign that I'm still holding in the sugyo of egloh arufoh that we studied together before I left.

How did Yosef do this? Do you think it was simple? He became a slave, he was thrown in jail, he became the most powerful man in Egypt. How did he remain Yosef under all those influences? By constantly being focused on the Torah he learned with Yaakov.

You are going to go through life full of tests – whether it is in a workplace or being a Rosh Yeshiva. Whether you are a doctor, a lawyer, or an accountant, you constantly ask yourself: is this is how the Torah wants me to behave? Yaakov was exceedingly wealthy, but his mind was always in Torah – this is where his center was. This is where Yosef was.

If you want the Torah to change you, and you immerse yourself in Torah, you become a superior individual. We take Torah seriously and we want the Torah to change you. How are you going to remain a ben Torah 22 years from now? The only way to do it is by asking yourself if this is what the Torah wants of you. That is our goal.