

## PARSHAS VAYEISHEV 5778

Sefer Bereishis is a compilation of stories with enormous significance. The Ramban says "ma'aseh ovos simon le'bonim". The stories of the Ovos carry a message that is relevant for all Jewish history. The Ovos are examples to us for how high a human being can reach, what it takes to transmit a mesorah, and how to raise families and build communities.

Avrohom Ovinu was unique. Hashem saw in Avrohom Ovinu, a quality that other contemporary tzaddikim lacked — the ability to perpetuate a set of beliefs and attitudes to members of his household and descendants long after he is gone. Shem and Ever were great tzaddikim who ran a yeshiva and taught talmidim. The Ovos learnt there. But Shem and Ever weren't Ovos — they didn't create a legacy that would outlast them. According to the Midrash the Parsha begins with the statement that Yaakov was a continuation of his father and grandfather.

Yaakov had Yosef who was a ben zikunim which is typically understood as "a son born to him in old age". The problem is that Binyomin was even younger — and Yosef wasn't vastly younger in age than many of his older brothers. Targum Onkelos says that the true meaning of ben zikunim is ben chakim – his leading talmid.

In order for Yaakov Ovinu to establish a tzibur that would follow in his derech, he needed to learn with his sons and impart his teachings to them directly. Who was Yaakov's best disciple? Yosef Hatzaddik. This act of imparting of Torah wisdom is the medium which forges the closest connection between father and child. We say "ki heim chayeinu ve'orech yomeinu." We mean that Torah is the essence of our lives. Then when we share Torah with others, we are sharing the thing that is most dear to us. Naturally, sharing what is most dear to us forges a close bond to those with whom we share it.

When Yaakov escaped the confrontation with Eisov and came back to Eretz Yisroel, the Torah says he went to Sukkos where he built a permanent home for himself and made a sukkah for his flock. This is why the place was called Sukkos. This is strange. Why is Yaakov stopping before he reaches Yitzchok in Chevron to settle in a place for a significant period of time? The Targum Yonasson explains that this was no ordinary house. It was a Beis Medrash for learning Torah. After living in Lovon's household for twenty years, Yaakov wanted to make sure that the permanent location of his family was Torah. He made a temporary place for his flock.

When Yaakov moved to Egypt, he sent Yehudoh ahead to Goshen to establish a Beis Medrash there. There has to be a permanent place for learning Torah. Yaakov demonstrated to his family the primacy and centrality of limud haTorah in every situation and every environment he found himself in. So Yaakov taught all his children Torah.

Yosef in Egypt maintained that immersion in Torah. Imagine what Yaakov would have been thinking if he thought that the

evil despot who was making their lives miserable turned out to be none other than Yosef! All his dreams of fathering a nation of 12 Shivtei Koh would have been dashed. So how did Yosef manage to communicate to his father that he was still the same Yosef haTzaddik, the same Ben Chakim who left 22 years ago with the same ideals and goals? The message he sends to his father when the brothers go back home is that he is still learning the same sugya that he was learning when he left. There is still a mesorah. There is still a continuity of the mesorah being perpetuated by Yosef in Egypt.

Indeed, what was it that kept Yosef from leaving the mesorah of the Ovos? After all, just imagine going through what Yosef went through—the utter rejection by his brothers, being stripped of his favored status under Yaakov and sold as a common slave on the slave market in Egypt. If he were alive today, Yosef would need an entire staff of psychologists to deal with the trauma of rejection and loss of self and identity. Despite all that, Yosef remained Yosef Hatzaddik. How? By still learning the same Torah he was learning when he left. That's how one holds on to one's yiddishkeit.

Yaakov faced similar challenges. Yaakov was living in Be'er Shevah with his father Yitzchok, and is told he has to go to live with his uncle Lovon. It is a drastic change in life circumstances and a potentially disastrous one for Yaakov's ruchniyus. Yaakov is an Ish Tam Yoshev Ohalim, and now he has to take up residence with the biggest swindler and trickster in the world and somehow maintain his integrity and build a family over the course of twenty years? How does Yaakov prepare himself for this radical transition? He goes to learn in Yeshivas Shem Vo'Ever for 14 years.

What was lacking in his father Yitzchok's yeshiva? The Midrash tells us that Yitzchok's home was like Avrohom's home—it was open to the world in order to influence strangers. Yaakov needed a closed environment in order to immerse himself totally within the experience of learning Torah without distractions. That is how he had to ability to stand up to the nisyonos of Lovon and reach the level of the highest of the ovos. That is how he was able to continue the ideals that he received from the Ovos.

Yitzchok absorbed the teachings of his father Avrohom and eventually rose to the level of offering himself as a korban. But after that's over, how do you hold on to that incredible hisorerus? How do you integrate it and turn it into something permanent? The Torah tells us that after the akeidoh, Avrohom returned to the lads and went back to Be'er Shevah. Where is Yitzchok? The midrash says Yitzchok immediately went to Yeshivas Shem vo'Ever to learn. This was Yitzchok's way of solidifying the incredible level that he achieved at the akeidoh. He had to immerse himself in a whole different atmosphere of limud haTorah.

Learning Torah is a mitzvah, but it is also the way we hold on

to our yiddishkeit and pass our mesorah on to the next generation. It is the medium through which we connect to the next generation and the next generation connects to us. We share it because it is a part of our deepest identity and we use it to raise our families and build our communities with a unique Torah culture and way of thinking and looking at the world. It is the primary focus of our lives and it is always occupying the greatest kevius among all our priorities and activities.

When Yaakov saw the agolos, he realized immediately that Yosef was still immersed in limud haTorah and was able to overcome all the nisyonos of golus. These were incredible nisyonos—especially for a young boy of 17 completely isolated from his family. It seems there was something else which enabled Yosef to resist the temptations of the wife of Potifar in particular. She was offering him everything. The gemara says that right before Yosef was about to succumb, the image of his father Yaakov confronted him. Why did that image of Yaakov pop into Yosef's mind at all? Why wasn't Yosef able to forget about his past and start a new life in Egypt? Obviously it was a result of the deep connection that Yaakov forged with Yosef through their limud haTorah back in Eretz Cana'an. He is still learning the same Torah he was learning with his father. This is how he held on to the image of Yaakov Ovinu.

There are genuine relationships which limud HaTorah can generate, but it can only be genuine when it reflects who you are at the core. You share your essence and the result is a genuine relationship.

I myself was born in America and lived there for many decades. But when I moved to Eretz Yisroel, I formed deep, genuine relationships with native families here, despite being an immigrant and barely knowing the language. How did that happen? Because we shared something of our essence with each other—limud haTorah. Even though they didn't know of the various sports I played in my youth, it didn't matter. That wasn't my essence. When I reflect on which people in my life I have remained genuinely close to over the decades, I realized that it is only with those people with whom I shared something of my essence. It is not the baseball or the football games of my youth.

For some people, baseball and football are their essence and that is the only way they can genuinely connect with others. Other people's essence is money. All their genuine relationships revolve around money. But the essence of a Jew is the Torah he learns, and the relationships he forges with his children and grandchildren and with those within his circle are around Torah.

I'm named after my grandfather. I was born shortly after he passed away. I never knew him personally, but I can still tell you a lot about him. How? Because I grew up with his Torah and learned his Torah. That was who and what my grandfather was. He was defined by his Torah and that Torah and that self-definition through Torah became a part of me too. That is how I know him.

The Ovos achieved a very lofty spiritual level. But at the same time, they are examples held up by the Torah, that we are meant to follow—how to maintain our level in ruchniyus, how to raise a family and build a community around Torah, etc. They had a consistent tool that they used—making a kevius in limud haTorah. We don't know what Torah they learned, but we do know that whatever Torah they did learn became their essence which they shared with their children and grandchildren.

I discuss the process of building a husband-wife relationship

with the talmidim before they go into shidduchim. Marriage is a partnership. You share a life together, each one from a different angle. I tell them that although I don't share my intricate havono of a sugya with my wife, we share the same value for Torah as a bedrock of our lives and our aspirations for our children. We share our ruchniyus life together because we define ourselves by those shared ruchniyus goals.

We just published a kovetz of chiddushim written by our alumni which made a very important statement. There were 150 submissions by talmidim who are engaged in all forms of parnosoh. Talmidim who are klei kodesh, doctors, dentists, lawyers, businessmen illustrated that our influence on their lives was that their kevius in limud haTorah is something that they have not compromised on. Out of about 1,100 talmidim, the overwhelming majority are still taking their limud haTorah very seriously.

The goal of your years in yeshiva is to achieve total immersion in the world of Torah in order to define your essence in terms of Torah.

The Mechilto asks a very strange question—why did Hashem keep Klal Yisroel in the Midbor for 40 years and not bring them immediately into Eretz Yisroel? The obvious answer is that Klal Yisroel sinned with the incident of the meraglim and were not allowed to enter. But the Mechilto gives a different answer. It says that had Hashem brought Klal Yisroel immediately into Eretz Yisroel, each person would immediately become preoccupied with normal economic life and struggling to make parnosoh with no time for total immersion in limud HaTorah. So Hashem took them into the midbor and provided them with everything they needed—ananei hakovod, mon, and be'er—in order to allow them to be totally undistracted by the need for parnosoh and all there was to occupy their time was learning Torah. Day after day for forty years until the Torah was absorbed into their bones. After that you can go into farming and commerce knowing that your center will always be in Torah.

The Eglei Tal says the Torah becomes a simchah in your life when it gets absorbed in your blood and you have immersed yourself totally in limud haTorah.

Talmidim who left yeshiva and have become top professionals in their field tell me that Toras Moshe left such a deep impression on them that they still feel totally connected to the yeshiva. As a result, they ask shailos and eitzos about how to conduct their business and raise their families in a Toradik way. Limud haTorah is how they look at their life and how they define themselves. That is how they form genuine connections and relationships and build their families. I tell them to learn with their children in order to make a genuine and deep keshet. The one who connected on the deepest level with Yaakov Ovinu was Yosef because he was the biggest talmid.

One of the reasons we have all the rules in yeshiva is to design an environment where one can get a total experience of immersion in Torah. It doesn't matter if you are going to become a Rosh Yeshiva, or a mechanech, a professional or a businessman. You will certainly become a Jewish husband and a father building a Jewish home, and that means you need to make Torah your essence no matter what you do for a parnosoh. Your family and children will look very different when their father's Torah is absorbed in his bones. The rules may be difficult, but the end goal is total immersion in Torah which inevitably leads to a sosson ve'simchah and a ta'anug in limud haTorah.