BS”D

**Parshas Vayishlach**

*The text raises various questions:*

*Why do we still refer to Yaakov as “Yaakov” when G-d tells him his name is no longer Yaakov but Israel?*

*The story of the pillar, libation, and pouring of oil is exactly what Yaakov did when he first encountered this spot upon leaving Eretz Yisrael. He built a pillar then. How come he’s building another pillar?*

**Yaakov’s Journeys**

by Rabbi Chaim Zev Citron

After the incident of Dina and Shechem and the destruction of the city of Shechem by Shimon and Levi, G-d appears to Yaakov and tells him that it is time for him to fulfill the promise he made when he left Canaan. He should go to Beis El and build an altar to G-d.

     Yaakov tells his family that they must remove any idolatrous objects that they may have gathered from the spoils of Shechem and purify themselves and change their clothing. The forbidden objects were handed over to Yaakov who burned them under a tree near Shechem.

     The Ramban points out that Jewish law requires idolatrous objects to be burned rather than buried. He points out, however, that if such an object were to be “nullified” by a non-Jew, i.e., that is a non-Jew can reject the object rendering it no longer idolatrous, it is permitted to use. In this case the objects were usable and did not have to be burned. Nevertheless, Yaakov went beyond the legal requirement and had them burned.

     The Ibn Ezra says that just as the family of Yaakov prepared to worship G-d at the altar by purifying themselves (ritual washing and immersion) and changing into fresh clothing, so too when we go to pray in the synagogue our bodies and clothing must be clean.

     The Kli Yakar says that the Torah tells us to remove the foreign g-ds that are within you (“*b’sochechem”*). This means that they must first purify their hearts from inappropriate thoughts and only afterwards wash their bodies and clothing.

     The Torah continues to tell us that Yaakov journeys to Luz, also known as Beis El and builds an altar. Devorah, the nurse of Rivkah, dies and is buried beneath a tree that is known as the “Oak of Weeping.”  G-d appears to Yaakov and tells him that his name is no longer Yaakov, but Yisrael (Israel.)  G-d blesses him and tells him that he and his children will inherit the land. Yaakov sets up a pillar, offers a libation, puts oil on it, and calls the site Beis El.

     The text raises various questions: Why is the story of Yaakov’s altar-building and G-d’s blessing him interrupted by the story of the death of the nurse Devorah?  Why do we still refer to Yaakov in the rest of the Torah as “Yaakov” when G-d tells him his name is no longer Yaakov but Israel? The story of the pillar, the libation, and the pouring of oil is exactly what Yaakov did when he first encountered this spot when he was leaving Eretz Yisrael. He built a pillar then. How come he’s building another pillar?

     The Ramban says that when Devorah died, Yaakov was also informed that his mother Rivkah had died. This explains the intense mourning of Yaakov and his calling the place the “Oak of Weeping.”  When G-d speaks to him afterwards, it is not merely a continuation of the previous sentence where Yaakov builds an altar. Here G-d is comforting Yaakov upon the loss of his mother. Similarly, G-d comforted Yitzchak after Avraham died (See above Breishis 25:11). The Ramban points out that the Torah says later (35:27): Yaakov came to his father Yitzchak. Rivkah is not mentioned. This clearly indicates that she was no longer alive.

     If we look at the text of the name-changing carefully, we will find an answer to our previous question. G-d says to Yaakov:  “Your name is Yaakov. You shall no longer be called Yaakov, but Israel is your name (35:10). “Your name is Yaakov” can be interpreted: “Your name is *still* Yaakov. Nevertheless, you will not be called *only* Yaakov, but also Yisrael (Sforno).

     There is much discussion in the commentaries, especially in Chassidus, of the concept that Yaakov—and every other Jew— has both levels within him: Yaakov, the person who must struggle constantly, and Yisrael, the master and prince. We’ll leave further discussion of that for a later time.

     Now, as far as the monument that Yaakov set up and upon which he poured a libation, the Ibn Ezra says it should be understood not as if he is now setting up the monument, but rather it should be read as Yaakov had previously set up the monument. Now when he returned to that site years later, he offered libations and poured oil once more as he worshipped and thanked G-d for fulfilling his promise to bring him safely home.

     There is a unifying principle in all of the incidents that I quoted until now as well as several incidents that follow. The interpretation that follows is based on the Mei HaShiloach:

 In our parsha, Yaakov is exposed to much suffering, but after each incident, G-d comforts him.

After the confrontation with Esav, Yaakov arrives in Shechem and builds an altar proclaiming “G-d is the G-d of Israel.”

After the tragic incident with Dina, G-d tells Yaakov to go to Beis El and make an altar.

After the death of Devorah and Rivkah, G-d blesses Yaakov and adds the name Yisrael.

After the death of Rachel, the Torah says that Yaakov pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder. We can interpret both words Migdal and Eder as representing strength. After the death of Rachel, which was for Yaakov the greatest pain of all, he found the strength to continue and not to question G-d.

After the incident of Reuven, the comfort was “The sons of Yaakov were twelve (35:22),” meaning all of Yaakov’s sons were to become the people of Israel; Reuven was not excluded.

The final comforting was when at last Yaakov joined his father Yitzchak in Chevron. Chevron, says the Mei Hashilo’ach, is the place where heaven and earth are joined (*chevron* comes from the word *l’chaber,* to join).

     My understanding of this interpretation is this:  In our journey through life, we encounter setbacks and difficulties, sometimes even, *lo aleinu,* tragedies. We often cannot understand why these things happen. But although we may not have answers, we do find G-d’s comforting hand that helps us to go forward. And that is what we must do. To know the preciousness of our lives and to continue the journey onward; to grapple with the unknowable and to trust in G-d’s goodness and comfort. Ultimately to reach the place where heaven and earth join, to a place where our whole earthly life is suffused with G-dliness. Ultimately, this is the time of Moshiach, when we all “return in peace to our Father’s house.”