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**PARASHAT VAYETZE**

SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL *ZT”L*

**Yaakov and the Stones**

Translated by Kaeren Fish

"And Yaakov went out from Beer Sheva… and he slept over there… and he took from *the stones* of that place and placed them at his head…" (*Bereishit* 28:10-11)

"[The stones] began to argue amongst themselves, one saying, 'Let the righteous one lay his head upon me,' while the other said, 'Let him rest it upon me.' The Holy One, blessed be He, formed them into a single stone, as it is written [thereafter]: 'And the took *the stone* which he had placed at his head.'" (Rashi, ad loc.)

"R. Yehuda said: Yaakov took twelves stones, and God decreed that he would established twelve tribes. [Yaakov] said, 'Avraham did not establish them; neither did Yitzchak. As for me – if these twelve stones join themselves together, I will know that I am to establish twelve tribes.' Since the twelves stones joined themselves together, he knew that he would be the father of twelve tribes.

R. Nechemia said: He took three stones. He said: 'God showed His Oneness through Avraham, and also through Yitzchak. As for myself – if these three stones join themselves together, I will know that God will make His Oneness known through me, too…'

The Sages said: The smallest number of stones that may be referred to in the plural is two. [Yaakov said:] Avraham had some progeny who were not worthy: Yishmael and all the children of Ketura. Yitzchak, too, bore Esav and all of his captains. As for myself – if these two stones join together, I will know that no unworthy progeny will emerge from me…" (*Bereishit Rabba* 68, 11)

The Torah does not elaborate on the powerful emotions that Yaakov experiences when he is forced to leave his home, against his will. Does Yaakov indeed request of God only "bread to eat and a garment to wear" (*Bereishit* 28:20)? The midrash above adds a prior concern and supplication, which is not material in nature: Yaakov wonders whether he will indeed be the father of twelve tribes. Will God's Oneness be demonstrated through him? Will some of his descendants be unworthy? Yaakov in his wanderings is seized with the same sense of mission that had guided his father and his grandfather, and he is preoccupied with the question of whether he will indeed continue their dynasty.

After receiving from Yitzchak a blessing "of the dew of the heavens and of the fat places of the earth… nations shall serve you…" (*Bereishit* 27:28-29), Yaakov was downcast. Yitzchak had mentioned no spiritual gifts. Only later, as he was about to leave his home for Charan, when Yitzchak was fully aware and certain that it was Yaakov who stood before him, did he bestow the blessing of Avraham. Seforno (commenting on *Bereishit* 27:29) explains:

"For [Yitzchak] had thought that it would be to Yaakov's benefit to suffice with an inheritance in the Land of Israel, and that he would live there in subservience to some other power, so that he would not have to trouble himself extensively with matters of government… Therefore, in this blessing, which he had meant to give to Esav, he made no mention of the blessing of Avraham, nor of Eretz Yisrael. He mentioned these to Yaakov only later, when he knew that it was him he was blessing."

In the home of Avraham and Yitzchak, the general feeling was that the chosen people was in the process of being created. Yaakov understands that all along the intention had been for him to receive the blessing of Avraham; now he is forced to flee his home because he had taken the blessing of "dew of the heavens" and "fat places of the earth,” which has no spiritual dimension to it. He is disturbed by the following question: "Perhaps my father was right, and power does indeed corrupt a person, and is not a worthy characteristic for the chosen nation that is destined to emerge from me?" At this point, when Yaakov lays down his knapsack and prepares for his first night outdoors, he collects some stones and looks towards the heavens: Will he indeed merit to establish twelve tribes? Will God's Oneness be expressed through him? And lo and behold – the stones do in fact join themselves together; "And he took *the stone* which he had placed at his head…."

The midrash offers the following interpretation of the ladder in Yaakov's dream:

"The Holy One, blessed be He, showed him the princes of four kingdoms ascending and descending. God said to Yaakov, 'Ascend.' But Yaakov responded with unwillingness to ascend, for fear of a subsequent descent, as he had witnessed among those kingdoms. God responded that he would have no descent, but because of his hesitation, he would be subjugated to the kings and their kingdoms."

Had Yitzchak been correct in not wanting to bless Yaakov with sovereignty? Perhaps this is what Yaakov was thinking – "Just as these [angels who ascended the ladder eventually] descended, so will I descend!"

The involvement with the "dew of the heavens and the fat places of the earth,” the fact that nations would serve him and that he would rule over and subjugate other peoples – would this not damage his spiritual power, his chosenness?

Rav Kook writes:

"'Let my master then pass before his servant' (*Bereishit* 33:14) – It is not appropriate for Yaakov to involve himself in government so long as it entails bloodshed, so long as it demands a capability for evil. We received only the foundation necessary for the establishment of a nation…" (*Orot, Orot Ha-milchama* 3)

But Divine Providence brought about a situation whereby Yaakov receives the blessing of "nations shall serve you,” as well, and God promises, "Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread westward and eastward… and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you" (*Bereishit* 28:14). This being so, Yaakov must preserve the blessing of Avraham which he has received, along with his status as a national power. Rav Kook continues:

"We have abandoned politics… until the propitious time arrives when it becomes possible to run a country without evil and barbarism… It will be possible to run our country on the foundations of goodness, wisdom, uprightness and clear Divine illumination."

May this come true speedily in our days, amen.