

THE FOUR ELLS OF HALACHA PARSHAS VAYAITSAI RABBI MENACHEM ROKEACH

The rabbi's calculated the years of Yaakov's life and found fourteen years unaccounted for. These are the fourteen years, they said, that he spent studying at the Beth Medrosh of Shem and Ever, prior to his journey to Choron where he married Leah and Rachel (see Megilah 17a, quoted in Rashi Braishis 28;9, and Mahrsho ibid. who explain how the rabbis arrived at this conclusion). The Netziv adds that this is the meaning of the otherwise redundant phrase recording Yaakov's exit from Beer-Sheba and his journey to Choron (28:10). Actually these were two separate events taking place fourteen years apart.

These fourteen years are most significant in Yaakov's life. In fact, an entire passage is included in the Chumosh only for the purpose of accurately calculating these years. Said Reb Yochanan: "Why does the Torah record the life span of Yishmoel?" It is in order to enable us to compute the years of Yaakov" (Megilah ibid., Rashi 25;17) The account is as follows: Yishmoel's death at the age of 137 coincided with his daughter's marriage to Esau, and the blessing bestowed upon Yaakov who was 74 years younger, was thus 63 at the time. Add 24 years that Yaakov spent with Lovon until Joseph is born, Joseph's 30 years when he became viceroy of Egypt, 7 years of plenty, 2 years of famine, when Yaakov meets Pharaoh, adding up to a total of 116, when in fact he tells Pharaoh he is 130 (47:9). The 14 years at Shem and Ever make up for the discrepancy).

Anyone sensitive to the relevancy of Chumosh to our day will readily see the meaning derived from the above mathematical account for the millennial contention between Yaakov and Esau, and for our current clash with Yishmoel. The Beth Hamedrash of Shem and Ever was not merely a hide-out from Esau's wrath. It constituted a fortress enabling him to contend with his adversary, as it remains today a powerhouse to overwhelm OUR antagonists.

What is most intriguing is that an event of such magnitude in Yaakov's life is not mentioned specifically in the chumosh, but only hinted at, by calculations in connections with the life of Yishmoel and his daughter's marriage to Esau (and according to the Netziv, the opening phrase of the Sidra).

One may assume it is because Yaakov spent those years of study secretly, thus the information is conveyed in like manner. More profoundly, however, we find here the real power of Torah that is studied in secret, in the unassuming privacy of one's

life, in the unknown, unnoticed, quiet dialogue between himself and Abaya and Rova over the desk, during the night at home, or during retreat in the day at the office. While study B'ROV AM, in multitude, is certainly more majestic, study in privacy, or small group has vigor and romance.

It may be this little nest where the individual where the individual or the small group studies Torah that the Rabbi's referred to as "the four ells of the law", proclaiming: "Since the destruction of the Beth Hamikdosh, all that the Almighty has in His world is the four ells of Halacha" (Brochos 8a)