

VAYEITZEI 5774

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Ya'akov is transformed. In Parashat Toldot he is described as an "Ish Tam, Yosheiv Ohalim" (25:27) "wholesome man abiding in tents". In other words, a typical yeshiva bachur, who sits and learns with no interest in the outside world. Ya'akov passively deceives his father Yitzchak at the request of his mother Rivkah to get the Brachot. At the end of Toldot he obeys his father to leave the land of Ke'na'an to seek a wife in Charan, and he obeys his mothers' wishes to flee from Ke'na'an in order to save his life from Eisav who intends to kill him.

In Charan, after finding Rachel, the wife of his choice, Lavan agrees to the marriage, but only after Ya'akov completes seven years of work for Lavan. After seven years Lavan tricks him into marrying Leah instead of Rachel. Only after working for Lavan another seven years does he finally get marry Rachel. Notice, until now, Ya'akov is portrayed as a weak yeshiva bachur and not able to control his own destiny, but merely obediently doing what he is told to do.

Suddenly, we see the emergence of a "new" Ya'akov. Having worked for Lavan for fourteen years he now begins to take his destiny into his own hands. During the next six years of working for Lavan, Ya'akov is able to biologically manipulate Lavan's flock into giving birth to more sheep that are spotted or dark, and in doing so, outsmarts his father-in-law and is able to come out the "winner" in their transaction. From this point on Ya'akov takes the initiative and is no longer content to be the victim or a pawn in the schemes of others. In next weeks' parasha, he is able to defeat a mysterious stranger in hand-to-hand combat, and to devise his own military plan that allows him to successfully confront the mighty Eisav. Apparently, something happened in Charan that changed Ya'akov, turning him into a person that is able to face up to challenges and emerge victorious.

I suggest that it was the birth of his children. HaShem had promised him upon leaving the land of Kena'an that "Your offspring will be as the dust of the earth" (28:14).. Now that his 13 children are born, Ya'akov experiences the beginning of that Nevu'ah (prophecy). Until now, he believed it will happen-some day, but now it is becoming a reality before his own eyes; he is living and experiencing the fulfillment of that promise. If that be the case then the next phase of the Nevu'ah, namely, "You will spread out powerfully...I am with you, I will guard you wherever you go"- will also be fulfilled right now. With that kind of guarantee Ya'akov sheds his feelings of timidity and emerges into the "new" Ya'akov, who will eventually be crowned with the name "Yisrael"-Israel.

Interestingly, many men go through a change of personality after their children are born. They acquire a new surge of self-confidence and self-esteem with the “creation” of a child, a human being. They, the two parents, now join a holy society, a partnership with G-d, as Chazal say, “Three partners are involved in the birth of a person; father, mother and HaKakosh Baruch-Hu” (Kiddushin 30a). Those who are fortunate enough to have grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren, have every right to feel this confidence and esteem, for they are truly experiencing the blessings from HaShem.