

# Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



## THE MAN OF TRUTH

### Vayeitzei

Ya'akov Avinu, our third Patriarch, takes center stage this week. The 'tent dweller' steps out of his comfort zone into the wide world. He must have been terrified. In the ancient world, nighttime was frightful. But God came to our ancestor in a vision upon a ladder, and assures him,

*'I am the God of your father Avraham and your father Yitzchak... Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you' (B'reishit 28:13 & 15).*

At this point, Ya'akov finds his voice, 'If God remains with me, protecting me on this journey that I am making, and giving me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and I return safe to my father's house, the Eternal shall be my God (verses 20-21). Voila! We have the heir to Avraham, the third and last Patriarch, the 'choicest of the Patriarchs', based on 'For God chose Ya'akov for Himself (T'hilim 135:4 & Midrash Rabba 76:1).

So, why was Ya'akov B'CHIR

HA'AVOT? The usual answers include that all of his children remained in the covenant and that he transformed the Hebrews from a clan to a fledgling nation, B'nei Yisrael. But I think that we have all the information we need in just this verse.

At first glance, this verse could paint Ya'akov in a negative light. He's seemingly making a deal with God. Does he not trust the B'RACHA Yitzchak gave him before leaving home, 'May He grant you the blessing of Avraham, that you may possess the Land which God assigned to Avraham' (verse 4)? Why is he conditioning his loyalty to the promise of safety?

Rashi's famous answer is that Ya'akov was asking of God that all of his progeny should be loyal to the covenant. He couldn't bear to repeat the agony his beloved father bore over the defection of Eisav. Others follow the Ramban who avers that there is no condition in our verse. The word IM (usually 'if') in verse 20 should be translated 'when', so there is no doubt or uncertainty in his statement at all.

Rabbeinu Bechaye, suggests that his great spiritual status is suggested by the nature of his request. Most people given the opportunity to make a request of God might ask for wealth

or fame. Ya'akov merely asks for safety, bread and a shirt on his back. Radak opines that his greatness was desiring his name to be coupled with God's in the mouths of mankind.

But I think that the best answer to our query is found in the very famous verse at the inspiring end of the book of Micha: You shall give truth (EMET) to Ya'akov, loving-kindness to Avraham; as You have promised in an oath to our Patriarchs from the days of antiquity (KEDEM, 'days of the beginning', 7:20). From this verse, our Sages have often reported that Ya'akov was the man of EMET and Avraham the one of CHESED.

What made Ya'akov the man of EMET? From last week's Torah reading, it would seem that he had a fraught relationship with truth. I know that we can explain away all his obfuscations, but on a literal level he's played fast and loose with the EMET.

So, what does make him the man of EMET? I strongly believe that it has nothing to do with 'truth' per se. The EMET here has to do with fulfilling promises; keeping deals. Everything Ya'akov receives, he earns (at least from this moment on). Not so Avraham. God gives great wealth to Avraham out of love and care. There are no tit-for-tat deals between

Avraham and his Maker. That kind of providing is called CHESED. The commodities are not worked for or bargained for. They arrive as largesse from our Creator.

Now pay attention to the exact words of Ya'akov: If You will protect me on this journey and give me bread to eat and clothes to wear, then YUD-HEI-VAV-HEI will be my ELO-HIM. What exactly is he saying? I believe that he's announcing that the God of kindness and forgiveness (the four-letter name) will become for me my ELO-HIM, God of power and judgment. I will work so hard at being good and righteous that I will no longer fear any Divine judgment.

Ya'akov commits himself at this specific difficult and terrifying juncture to be the deserving heir to Avraham and Yitzchak. He feels ready to face the adversity facing him. He is ready to encounter the third manifestation of EMET.

The S'fat Emet explains in parshat Vayishlach (B'reishit 32:11) that when Ya'akov says, 'I am unworthy (KATONTI) of all the CHASIDIM (kindnesses) and all the EMET which You have done for Your servant.' The Rebbe interprets this use of EMET to mean 'what one succeeds in actualizing himself... In every person there exists a unique Torah that is able to

be realized or actualized, and is a divine gift offered according to each person's portion.' Ya'akov did it. He became all that Ya'akov could ever be. That accomplishment is rare if not unique. That made him the man of EMET, his own unique EMET.

Ya'akov Avinu emerges as the 'choicest of the Patriarchs' because he is the model for us to become all that we can be. There is no greater accomplishment than to fully fulfill one's potential. That was Ya'akov's life trajectory and we must follow that paradigm. 