Parshas Vayeitzei

This week's Parsha is Vayeitzei, where Yakov ends up at his uncle Lavan's house, begins shepherding, marries Lavan's daughters, and starts his family. The Parsha is profoundly significant in showing us divine providence, the meaning of trust in Hashem, and what we must do as servants of Hashem, given what we can see in the parsha.

Let's begin with the fact that the Torah was physically given to the world on Har Sinai. Since there is no chronology in the Torah, the accounts of the early days of our forefathers were codified to explain what "already happened". Meaning, even though the Torah is the blueprint of the world (alpaim shana kadma Torah l'olam), we have been given these stories to derive lessons and to learn how to live our lives. Divine providence and intervention are woven into the stories, as the outcomes that brought us to where we are today are only because of the hand of Hashem. When Yakov and Esav were born, it isn't clear from the way the Torah records the family history whether Esav, the physical firstborn, would be the progeny of Avraham and Yitzchak rather than Yakov. We obviously see and know that Yakov was the progenitor and forefather of us Jews, but at the time of his living, this wasn't the case without the hard work and trust in Hashem. Yitzchak 'loved' Esav, and according to Rashi, Esav was charismatic, and had the gift of gab, and the laws on his tongue, which gave Yitzchak hope that he could try and keep Esav on a righteous path. He was mistaken (one can say that an alternative approach to his physical blindness was that Yitzchak, 'turned a blind eye' and overlooked Esav, which, in hindsight, meant he was mistaken, and Rivka's intervention, for pushing Yakov to get the 'firstborn' blessing, was justified). Yakov knew he would be in a spiritual and physical competition with Esav and was constantly receiving assurances from Hashem that he would be blessed, in accordance with the prophecy that Avraham would have children like the sand on the beach.

This week's Parsha begins similarly: after Yakov's dreams and subsequent assured blessings from Hashem for protection, he was light-footed, as Rashi explains (29:1). We see Yakov's physical strength when he removed the stone from the well; once he saw Rachel, it proves Yakov had unnatural physical strength, matching him physically with Esav. Then Yakov meets with Lavan, and the Posuk says (29:13) that Yakov explained everything to Lavan. Meaning, Lavan presumably learned why Yakov was running away and, in full disclosure, explained his whole family history, beginning with Rivka's prophecies about the twins. We see that when Lavan, the trickster, used specific language, he put Leah in the marriage canopy before Rachel. He says to Yakov 29:26, that in

this place we don't put the younger before the older, i.e. to snide Yakov about the 'trickery' that Yakov (i.e. the "tzeirah"- younger one who skipped the "bechor"- firstborn- a reference to the prophecy given to Rivka, that the older will serve the younger).

After Yakov made Lavan very wealthy, and ultimately left (in the middle of the night), after realizing that Lavan's attitude had changed, Lavan tracks Yakov's caravan down, and once he caught up and lambasts Yakov, one of the things he says is 31:28, "you did not allow me to kiss my children, and my daughters, you acted foolishly now by doing this." The words used were "Ata Hiskalta Aso." Aso and Esav have the exact spelling[1], as I've written about in the past, meaning, Lavan was taking one more jab at Yakov, telling him that he acted like Esav. (Bechor Shor touches upon this, that Lavan was criticizing Yakov for acting smart with Esav, and foolishly here). Sifrei Kohen points out an alternative, that Lavan was telling Yakov that he had reversed/thwarted Esav's plan. Supporting the idea that an alternative reading here will show Lavan's role in Yakov's life, and that Lavan was trying to intervene in the destiny of Yakov. Lavan, in the following pesukim, clearly states that he had the power to do evil to Yakov, but that he had a dream in which he was told not to. Lavan himself was trying to intervene in Yakov's destiny, and Hashem made sure this didn't happen. Yakov stayed true to the path and remained a servant of Hashem, ultimately solidifying his place as our forefather despite the surroundings working against him.

Now we can understand why, in the Haggadah, it says that Pharaoh only wanted to destroy the boys, whereas Lavan wanted to destroy everything. Meaning Lavan tried as he might[2], but wanted to reverse the destiny (that in hindsight we know about), but Yakov's servitude resulted in the outcome of the birth of the Jews. What we must derive from this episode is that divine providence will always be there, but we must still do our part. What I mean is that Yakov was given the outcome that he would be blessed and protected (from evil, his brother, and the progeny of the blessings to Avraham), yet he didn't act as if he were entitled to this[3]. He

[1] Radak points out that Aseh (spelled Ayin Sin Hey) is the meaning, but it was spelled with a vov, i.e. drawing a connection to Lavan's jab at Yakov.

[2] Lavan was so steeped in his evil ways that, even though he acknowledged Hashem revealing Himself to Lavan (to warn Lavan against starting up with Yakov), he still looked to his idols (resulting in the inadvertent death of Rachel).

[3] When Yakov cried at the beginning of the Parsha, when he met Rachel for the first time, Rashi says, because he saw that he would not be buried with Rachel. Which begs the question, should Yakov have been more careful with his words, which resulted in Rachel's death, after the episode of the stealing of the idols? What we see here is that, although, as we are told, Yakov had some vision and clarity of the future, there was an alternative outcome that was not revealed, and still up to his

remained faithful to Hashem, ensuring that, despite strong outside forces, the outcome that needed to happen would (Im Lavan Garti-Taryag Mitzvos Shamarti-Yakov kept righteous for the duration of his time with Lavan).

We need to look for divine providence in everything that has brought us to this point, and build on that to determine how, while remaining on the righteous path as servants to Hashem, we can fulfill our destiny. Even though we are told Mashiach will come, we don't act entitled and let our lives happen; instead, we actively serve Hashem, bringing the opportunity for Mashiach to come sooner. Furthermore, in our own lives, we must realize that by living with and acknowledging divine providence in everything that happens, we may gain insight into what we must do to continue toward the outcome we desire. Instead of thinking that our destiny is unknown, or some physical and spiritual goal is unknown to us, make a goal known, and believe in all that divine providence has gotten you here until this moment, and what you can do about getting to the next desired outcome. By trusting in Hashem, we must act, and the rest will be taken care of. But acting isn't just like an animal; rather, it is within the servitude and guise of Torah, and with Hashem. We are blessed with Chassidus, and the direction outlined by the Chassidic masters, which is a relatively novel approach to being a Yid than heretofore experienced by Jews throughout history. It is with the knowledge of Chassidus, and the innerworkings of Torah as taught by the Rabbeim we can derive, and learn more about how to act, and what power to harness for revealing the outcome we are destined for, i.e. Mashiach, which is on a general level, but even on a specific level, for our day to day service, if we think about divine providence in our lives, we can gain insight into what we must do next. With the Torah telling us how Hashem was involved in Yakov's life, and Yakov's life was engaged with Hashem, we know what we must do.

Good Shabbos

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actions. Tied into the point above, that our actions define our outcome ultimately, even if we are told that there is some outcome at the end.