

Are you respecting others based on their "religious" garb? Then read Radak, Tzefania 1:8, he disagrees. Does reputation outweigh their lack of intelligence? Then read Chovas HaLevayos' introduction. Are you attracted to the nonsensical ideas of your "religious" neighbors, even though it runs contrary to our Sages? Are you not thinking into ALL your beliefs and affairs, following only what is intelligent? God gave us EACH intelligence with which to think. Make time to learn diligently, following only God and the Rabbis - not your idolatrous co-religionists. Wisdom alone will show you the TRUTH.

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Parshas Vayetzai

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And Hashem stood by it. And He said, 'I am Hashem, the G-d of Avraham your father and the G-d of Yitzchak your father. I will give you and your descendants the land that you lie upon. Your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth. You shall spread to the west, east, north and south. All the families of earth will be blessed through you and your descendants.'" (Beresheit 28:13-14)

Yaakov flees his father's home in order to escape the anger of his brother, Esav. He is traveling to Charan. He seeks refuge in the home of his uncle, Lavan. Evening comes before Yaakov has left the land of Canaan. Yaakov makes a camp and falls asleep. He has a vision. In this vision, the Almighty addresses him. Our pesukim contain a portion of this prophecy. Hashem promises Yaakov that he and his descendants will possess the land that he sleeps upon. His descendants shall multiply. They will become as numerous as the dust of the earth. They will expand in all directions. There seems to be a contradiction in these promises. First, Hashem promises Yaakov that he and his descendants will possess the land that Yaakov now sleeps upon. This seems to refer to a specific area. Sforno explains that it refers to the land of Canaan. Rashi quotes the Talmud and offers a similar

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The famous Midrash, "Rocks arguing over the righteous one", means that the physical world finds its true purpose only when utilized by a person for righteousness and Torah. Midrashim are not literal - rocks cannot talk. (Stated by Maimonides' son and other Sages.)



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Understanding Rashi

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I am an Orthodox Jew and I have a problem. If you can believe it, I don't like Rashi! At all! I regret to say this. It would be so much easier if I could be in awe of his knowledge. But he causes me to distrust the whole concept of the Mesorah. I feel he asks us to believe fantastic things in order to accommodate Midrashic interpretations or his world view

The Uniqueness of the Nation

RIVKA OLENICK

"And I will take you to Me for a people, I will be to you a God, and ye will get to know that I am 'H your God, Who bringth you out from the burdens of Egypt." (Exodus 6:7) "I am the God Who took you out of Egypt, now I will be a God to you and you will get to know Me as your God, and I will take you to Me as my people" seems to make better logical sense. However, the Torah was not written to satisfy anyone's expectations. What is the importance of stating first, "I will take you to Me for a people?" Li L'am, My people you will be to Me. What are we supposed to understand having established first that we are His people? We have not come to Mt. Sinai yet. We are to be as His entity of "My people" His, with no land, nothing that is rightfully ours, just us, a people. Shouldn't we first understand that God took us and brought us out of Egypt? Wouldn't it make sense that first we would see what God did for us?

In Egypt we had no freedom, we were treated as aliens, and were oppressed in every way. Harsh laws and taxes were imposed on us. What did we have there besides all of these heavy burdens? What was our existence there? We, the descendents of Abraham who sunk into the depths of helplessness living in the most pathetic state - as slaves! Slaves of the most corrupt, materialistic and animalistic nation. We were total "strangers" and hated with no one to take up our cause.

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Understanding Rashi

□ **RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

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(the Patriarchs were perfect). How is it to be believed that Yaakov didn't lie to Yitzchak when the holy words of Torah say that he did just that, albeit for a good reason? How is it fathomable that Eisav cold halachically slaughter meat with a bow and arrow?

Is it possible to study in a 100% Orthodox way and not accentuate Rashi? Thank you.

Mesora: Belief in Rashi, or any other Torah commentator's words on philosophy, is not obligatory. We must only follow the Rabbis in areas of halacha, Jewish Law. The Torah teaches, "Al pi haTorah asher yorucha", "In accordance with the Torah (commands) that they teach you." Outside of Torah law, the Rabbis have been given no jurisdiction by God. You need not agree with them. The Torah is replete with arguments between this Rabbi against that Rabbi. Ramban did not take Maimonides' words as "truth". Ramban used his own mind to determine what makes sense. In philosophy, we have no obligation to follow any given author. Their is no "psak" in hashkafa. We must use our minds, as did the Rabbis. Use your mind as you see makes sense.

However, let us not be so fast to dismiss Rashi, a brilliant thinker, without due study of his words. Perhaps what Rashi is saying is something deeper than the surface meaning. I recently read an Ibn Ezra which made a statement which astonished me. The Ibn Ezra says on the command to Abraham to "be perfect" the following commentary, "You should not ask why perform circumcision." On the surface, Ibn Ezra defies all which he stands for, i.e. a life of understanding. How then can he verbalize such a statement? I don't believe Ibn Ezra is saying we should not use our minds. Rather, he is teaching us that Abraham should not make his performance of divine decrees dependent on his own intelligence. Ibn Ezra teaches that man can fall prey to an erroneous notion that "only when I know the

reasons will I perform, but not before". To this, Ibn Ezra teaches, "do not inquire why the circumcision". Do not let your inquiry determine your acts. "Be perfect with God and don't render your intelligence superior to his" - this is what Ibn Ezra is teaching.

We must respect the level of brilliance and ingenuity displayed in the Sages' commentaries, and not dismiss their words so quickly as nonsensical. If we can notice the obvious questions on THEIR writings, certainly they have noticed them too! And yet they committed their words to ink! Mustn't we then give them the benefit and assume the obvious questions which we lodge, were considered by them? Of course! Then let's do so with your Rashi, and see if we can unravel some deeper idea intended by Rashi.

In Genesis, 27:18, Isaac asks, "Who are you?" Yaakov replies, "I am Esav your firstborn." The Torah clearly states that Yaakov lied to his father Isaac in order to acquire the blessing justly sold to him by his twin Esav. But Rashi then interprets Yaakov's words "I am Esav your firstborn. to mean, "I am, (and) Esav is your firstborn." Meaning, Rashi seems to be twisting Yaakov's words from one flowing, lying statement, into two separate truths, that is, "I am" and "Esav is your firstborn." But the Torah clearly states that Yaakov lied! How can Rashi contradict the plain meaning of the Torah's words? Additional proof that Yaakov knew he was lying, was his response to his mother, "I might get caught." He didn't say, "it is wrong to lie."

I would like to pose a possible answer: Perhaps Rashi was teaching that although Yaakov lied, he still did not look at the situation of lying as a free-for-all permission to lie brazenly, and without control. Perhaps Yaakov, although lying, did so only with words that were necessary to fulfill his mother's command. So Yaakov chose words which veered less from the truth. Yaakov valued over all else, the search for truth, and living by truth. So even when it came to a necessary lie, he did so with the most minimalistic expression of a lie. He did not allow his emotion's any outlet, even in a situation where a lie

was essential.

Study of God's universe requires a complete allegiance to truth. This being Yaakov's dream, he wished to keep himself allegiant to truth at all costs, and was extremely careful not to allow a necessary lie to have any effect on his goal. Had Yaakov not been careful while lying, he feared that the attraction to lying might remain, how ever little, and he would suffer by losing knowledge if this tendency to lie might reappear later in his life.

Rashi teaches us through an apparent contradiction, and perhaps purposefully that startling, what high level of sensitivity to truth our Patriarch Yaakov displayed in even permitted actions. □

Futile Prayers to Find a Mate?

□ **RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

Reader: I have been praying to Hashem every day for about 18 years, to find a spouse. I don't see that I have ever met the right person, and I have come to the conclusion that praying is irrelevant, since G-d does not really answer. At the same time, I am expected to live like a monk, which is the opposite of Torah values. So isn't this life entirely absurd, damned if you do, damned if you don't!

Mesora: Because your situation is not going as you wish, you wrongly find the system at fault, and not yourself. Are you ignoring all of God's kindness to our patriarchs and matriarchs? All is in God's control. He hears all peoples' prayers.

Perhaps God wishes you to reflect and make internal changes. His will might be that you should not find what you seek, as it is not the best thing for you. The Talmud asks, (Yevamos 64a) "Why were our forefathers barren?" The answer, "God desires the prayers of the righteous." This means that God desires righteous people be placed in situations where they can further perfect themselves via prayer. God does not need their prayer, but He wishes they pray, as prayer allows one to verbalize their needs, and reflect on why they may not have received those needs. Such reflection

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□ Parshas Vayetzai

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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explanation. However, Hashem then tells Yaakov that his descendants will occupy and take possession of the land to the east, west, north and south. This seems to indicate that the territory of Yaakov's descendants will extend beyond the land of Canaan.

The commentaries offer various solutions to this problem. Sforno suggests the simplest approach. He explains that the two promises refer to different periods. The first promise refers to the near future. Yaakov will become a prince in the land of Canaan. His children would enjoy similar respect. Bnai Yisrael will be exiled to Egypt. But, eventually, Yehoshua will lead the nation in the conquest of the land. The second promise will not be fulfilled immediately. There is an intervening step. Hashem tells Yaakov that before the fulfillment of this promise, his descendants will become similar to the dust of the earth. Above, we explained this comparison to the dust in accordance with Unkelus' explanation. Unkelus understands this to mean that the population will be as numerous as the dust. Sforno offers a different explanation. The nation will experience exile. In exile, Yaakov's descendants will suffer terribly. They will become as low as the dirt. However, this exile will end with redemption. The Messiah will restore Yaakov's children to their land. At this point in time, the second promise will be fulfilled. Bnai Yisrael will spread beyond the borders of the land of Canaan. The nation will extend its boundaries in every direction.

Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik offers a different explanation. He explains that there are two ways an area can become part of the land of Israel. The first means is through Hashem's specific assignment. This applies to the land of Canaan. Hashem gave this land to Bnai Yisrael as a homeland. The second method is through conquest. Land that is conquered by Bnai Yisrael becomes part of the land of Israel. In other words, even an area that is not part of the original boundaries, as defined in the Torah, can become part of the land of Israel. This is accomplished through conquest of the land. Based on this analysis, Rav Soloveitchik resolves the contradiction between the two promises. First, Hashem promises Yaakov and his

descendants the land of Canaan. This is a specific area with defined borders. If the Almighty had stopped with this promise, other lands conquered by Bnai Yisrael would not be included in the nation's homeland. Therefore, Hashem adds that the nation will grow and expand the borders of the land. These extended borders will become the boundaries of the land of Israel. Conquest also defines the land as part of the land of Israel.

"Wait until this week passes and I will give you this one also for an additional seven years of work that you will do for me." (Beresheit 29:27)

Yaakov agrees to work for Lavan for seven years. In exchange, Lavan will give Rachel to Yaakov as a wife. Yaakov fulfills his obligation. Lavan deceives Yaakov and substitutes Leya for the younger Rachel. Yaakov confronts Lavan. He agrees to allow Yaakov to marry Rachel, as well. In return, Yaakov must agree to work for Lavan an additional seven years. Yaakov agrees to this arrangement. Yaakov marries Rachel and works for Lavan another seven years.

Rashi maintains, based upon the Talmud, that the Torah was revealed to the forefathers. The forefathers scrupulously observed the mitzvot. This creates a problem. The Torah prohibits a man from marrying two sisters. How could Yaakov marry Rachel and Leah? This is a violation of a prohibition of the Torah! Various commentaries ask this question. They provide a number of answers.

The Ohr HaChayim offers one of the most interesting responses. He explains that the avot – the forefathers – were rewarded for observing the mitzvot. However, they were not obligated to observe the commandments. Therefore, it was not inappropriate for the avot to make exceptions for themselves. In specific circumstances, they could justifiably decide to disregard a specific command. On the surface, this seems to be an odd thesis. The mitzvot are Hashem's guide to life. True, the avot were not obligated to observe the commandments. However, they benefited from adherence to this guide. How can their deviation from the Torah possibly be justified or explained? In order to understand the Ohr HaChayim's answer, we must answer this question. The Ohr HaChayim's position is based upon a profound understanding of the nature of halacha.

Halacha is a system of law. Law is composed of general rules. These rules

dictate appropriate behavior under specific circumstances. However, because the rules are general, they will apply even under circumstances for which they were not designed. Let us consider an example from secular traffic law. We are required to stop for stop signs. This law is designed to control the flow of traffic at intersections. Each motorist is obliged to stop and check vehicular and pedestrian traffic before proceeding. However, imagine you come to a stop sign late at night. The streets are deserted. You slow as you approach the intersection. But, rather than coming to a complete stop, you slowly roll through the intersection. Have you violated the law? Certainly, you have. It is true that the law was not designed or instituted to regulate minimal traffic on deserted streets. Nonetheless, the law is framed as a general rule. It must be obeyed, even under these circumstances for which it was not directly designed. The phenomenon we have just described will occur in any system of law. This is not because of a flaw in the system. It is because laws are general statements. This generalization in the formulation of the law produces the phenomenon. The law will apply even in situations for which it was not directly designed. We can now understand the position of the Ohr HaChayim.

The Torah was revealed to Bnai Yisrael at Sinai as a system of halacha. The mitzvot are generalized principles for behavior. They must be obeyed at all times. In other words, imagine that we were able to identify the exact purpose of a mitzvah. We could not limit our observance to the circumstances under which the purpose is fulfilled. A law must be observed at all times. The avot knew the Torah. However, it was not obligatory. This means it was not a system of halacha. Instead, it provided general guidance for life. The forefathers understood the purpose of some mitzvot. With this knowledge, they were able to determine the exact circumstances under which a mitzvah would apply. Yaakov had this understanding of the prohibition against marrying two sisters. He understood the purpose of this prohibition. Therefore, he was qualified to determine whether it applied to his own situation. He decided that the prohibition did not apply. He did nothing wrong in marrying Rachel and Leah. The key issue is that these mitzvot were not laws. Therefore, the individual could determine the application of the commandment to his or her personal situation.

And Rachel saw that she had not born children for Yaakov. Rachel was jealous of her sister. She said to Yaakov, "Give me children. For if not, I am dead." And Yaakov was angry with Rachel. He said, "Am I in the place of G-d, Who has withheld from you offspring?" (Beresheit 30:1-2)

Rachel is barren. Leya has children. Rachel is jealous of her sister. She asks Yaakov to help her conceive. Yaakov is angered by Rachel's entreaty. He feels that she has made an unreasonable request. In order to understand these passages, we must begin with a simple question. What was Rachel's expectation? How should Yaakov help her?

The commentaries respond to this question. They explain that Rachel asked Yaakov to pray on her behalf. This explanation creates an even greater obstacle to understanding these passages. Why did Yaakov become angry? Rachel made a completely appropriate request. It is fitting to turn to Hashem in a time of trouble! What better response could be expected of Rachel? The commentaries offer a wide variety of responses to this question. One of the most interesting is provided by Sforno. He explains that Yaakov felt that Rachel attributed to him too much power or influence. He told Rachel that only the Almighty could help her. She was wrong to rely on her husband. Apparently, Sforno maintains that there was nothing wrong with the substance of Rachel's request. She asked Yaakov to pray on her behalf. This is an appropriate response to suffering. However, Rachel phrased her request in an unacceptable manner. She did not say to Yaakov, "Pray for me." She said, "Give me children." This implies Rachel felt that the issue was in Yaakov's hands. She was completely reliant on Yaakov and confident in the efficacy of his prayers. This level of confidence and reliance is only appropriate in one's relationship with Hashem. Yaakov held a position in Rachel's mind that is exclusively reserved for the Almighty. Through having these feelings towards Yaakov, she was allowing Hashem's position to be usurped.

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 28:13. Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 28:13.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Bais HaLeyve – Commentary on the Torah, Parshat VaYaetzai. Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 26:5. Rabbaynu Chaim ibn Atar, Commentary Ohr HaChayim on Sefer Beresheit 49:3. R. Yonatan ben Uziel, Rashi, Nachmanides, R. Avraham ibn Ezra and others. Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 30:2. □

The Uniqueness of the Nation

RIVKA OLENICK

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Doesn't the Torah command us to welcome the stranger, treat them kindly and with justice because in Egypt we were once strangers with no rights of our own. What happened to the free will given to us, endowed by our Creator? We had no free will and so even more so it seems logical to know completely that God took us out of Egypt. That is not how the pusuk is phrased. He heard the "groaning of the Children of Israel." So, wasn't that a call, so to speak to God to take us out of Egypt? When He takes us out then we would know He took us to Him for a people, not before.

According to the Ramban: "He assured them that He will take them out from the land of the Egyptians and that they will no longer suffer from their heavy burden. So God asserted His judgements against the Egyptians and made us aware of our own right to call to Him to remember His covenant with the patriarchs. When we remembered our rights, which "is" our free will, we called Him. He freed us of our bondage and the other nations witnessed this! The Ibn Ezra states: "When I will redeem you with an outstretched arm visible to all nations, you shall know that it is I the Eternal Who performs new signs and wonders in the world, and that I am your God and for your sake I had so acted, for you are the Portions of the Eternal." God then brought us out and uplifted us as His people, so the other nations would see this, then the covenant with Abraham would be remembered. "And I will take you to Me for a people." Li L'am, to Me God, to be a people of Mine. God's plan was to take us for his people, then God would form us as a nation at Mt. Sinai where we would accept our nationhood, and live according to His Torah.

We were formed as the Jewish nation. The other "religions" that came later were formed based on the thoughts of man, whereas the nation is based on the thoughts, the divine word of God. The Torah tells us what God is supposed to be to us and the entire universe. We are to know what we as

His nation are supposed to mean to Him. This is what makes the Jewish nation qualitatively unique. So, since we were formed separately by Him, created for a completely different task in life, we therefore are to live a completely different existence, even in our eternal life. Our existence is based solely on God, not religion or religious ceremonies, so to speak.

"And I will take you to Me" not by way of a temple, or congregation strictly as a religion, but as a nation, an "am" in itself, only as an "am" itself. The "nation" is to function according to truths, it is God's divine word only that is inherent in this "nation", which was founded and established on these truths alone. "The Torah is therefore, is a Divine document the authentic form of which must be kept and preserved with scrupulous accuracy, so that man should be able to study and assimilate the Divine thoughts contained in it." (From Horeb- Samson Raphael Hirsch.) As a result of these truths there is a recognized relationship that exists between one another who share One common God, the One and Only God Who is the true Master of His people.

"I will be a God to you and you will get to know that I am Hashem your God." Through service individually, as an eved Hashem, a servant of God and together as a nation, the "am" and through His commandments "you will get to know that I am Hashem your God." You will get to know the purpose of your existence, the reason you were created and the reasons I formed you as a "nation." The bond, we, as a nation, have to each other is that we share one common God, nothing else. Whether we are in gulus or in time the Messiah assists us all to return to Israel, our bond as a "nation" and as a people is realized because we serve the same God. When the Temple is rebuilt it will be to sanctify God's name only to reinforce even more our true "bondage", which is only to God. There are no other gods, no false deities, or any other possible intermediary or thing, or structure or "tower" that takes you away from God. As the Shema states: Hear, O Israel: "Hashem is our God, Hashem, the One and Only." "Sanctify yourselves and be holy" as My nation, as I "bringth you out from the burdens of Egypt." And ye shall remain holy unto Me, for I,

God, Am holy and I have separated you from the nations to be Mine." (Leviticus 20:26.) "You are the first and You are the last and other than You we have no King, redeemer or savior. True, from Egypt You redeemed us, Hashem our God and from the house of slavery You liberated us." (The Shema).□

Futile Prayers to Find a Mate?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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has the potential that the person will observe a negative character trait, and work on himself to remove such a defect. Even for those like us, not on the patriarch's level, the Talmud says we should examine our ways when things are not well.

God's goal for man includes not only intellectual pursuits, but the follow-through, the perfection of his nature, his emotions, and his ethics. All these must follow his wisdom. At times we find intelligent persons with horrible traits. This dichotomy displays an imperfection in his convictions. It is natural that when one sees an idea clearly, he acts on it. Only one who has conviction of his ideas will follow through in action. But one who does not have clear ideas, lacks conviction in his values and his knowledge, and will not abide by the Torah's code of morality and interpersonal laws. When our matriarchs wished for children, they required perfection prior to taking on the vital role of mothers, so to raise children, important children, as best they could.

But without placing ourselves on their level, our approach to our goals may also be improper, destructive and even self defeating. Advice and counsel from one knowledgeable is essential at this point in your life. Speak to wise men dedicated to Talmud. They can, with a little discussion, detect where you can improve yourself. Listen without defensiveness, and see if their observations about your personality and actions are correct. Be objective if you wish success. □

At times, desperation finds its way into our hearts. You must not let this occur. Desperation was not displayed by King David, even though he suffered many troubling times: (Psalms 91:7-9)

"A thousand fall at your side, and ten thousand on your right, but to you they will not approach. Only with your eyes will you stare, and the retribution of the wicked will you see. Because You Hashem are my refuge..."

While tragedies surrounded David, he did not despair.

You must reflect on our Torah, learning that God created the ear, so He hears. He created man with the faculty of happiness, so He wishes our happiness. He can and constantly does interact with us. But we must be following His plan for us so that He assists us to His goal. If our goal is not His, He will not assist. But if our goal is His, be confident that he has so many methods to help you. False notion of a divine response sometime feed the desperation. But realize that God's method may be silence, as this affords you the opportunity to ask yourself, "Why hasn't He responded?" God creates these opportunities, as His wish is that we engage our minds in all areas, reflecting how we can better align ourselves with His Torah system. We each have the capabilities within us to rise to the task, and conquer our troubles. We need to realize that potential exists in each of us, and exert ourselves. I honestly feel when we exert our will to accomplish what is good for us, there is a way, and we will be assisted by God. Be convinced.

Engage your mind, review what I wrote, and take matters into your hands. Don't despair. Rather, look at this as an opportunity to finally get what you wish, a good mate. Locate an intelligent adviser who can help you discuss your behavior in this area, one who can correct your false views, who can show you errors in as many areas as possible, be it your personality, your values, your Torah adherence, or your approach to dating. The goal here is honesty about yourself so you may correct areas preventing you from reaching your goal of marriage. I wish you success, and you will find it if you follow the Torah's guidance. Be honest. Be courageous. Be intelligent. Be relentless. Be confident in God's abilities. Be successful. □